

**The History of Slavery  
in Mauritius  
and the Seychelles,  
1810-1875**

*Also by Moses D. E. Nwulia:*

*Britain and Slavery in East Africa*

# **The History of Slavery in Mauritius and the Seychelles, 1810-1875**

*Moses D. E. Nwulia*  
      



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## Preface

Mauritius and the Seychelles are peopled by immigrants from Europe, Africa and Asia. The Europeans came as free immigrants, the Africans as slaves, and the Asians mainly as indentured workers. Until the 1830s, when slave labor gradually gave way to "free" labor, slaves of African origin greatly outnumbered the other inhabitants. Thereafter, Asians (mainly natives of the Indian subcontinent) became the most numerous ethnic sector of Mauritian population, but Africans continued to predominate numerically in the Seychelles.

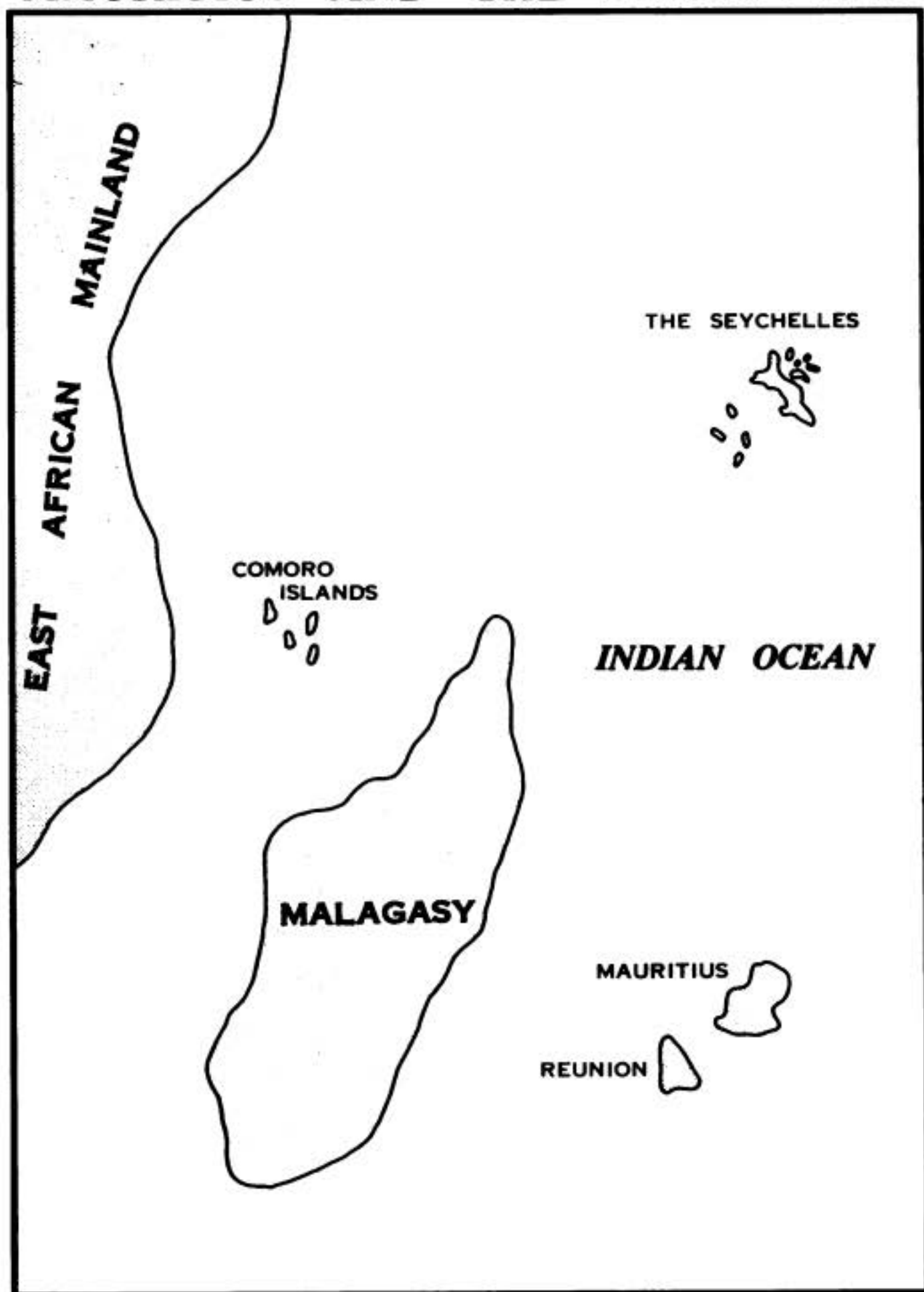
In spite of the significant presence of black slaves in the two countries, there is no adequate historical study of their contributions to the settlement and the development of the colony (the two countries were jointly administered as one colony until 1903, when the Seychelles became a separate colony), of the institution and heritage of slavery, or of race relations generally. General histories, such as *A Short History of Mauritius* by P.J. Barnwell and A. Toussaint, and sociological monographs, such as Burton Benedict's *Mauritius: Problems of a Plural Society* (1965) and *Peoples of the Seychelles* (1966), contain valuable information on these topics but they do not provide a full treatment of them.

The present study is an attempt to fill the lacuna noted above. The book is based on materials drawn from published and archival sources significantly relevant to the subject of investigation. The author wishes to thank those who helped him in one way or the other in his research and preparation of this book.

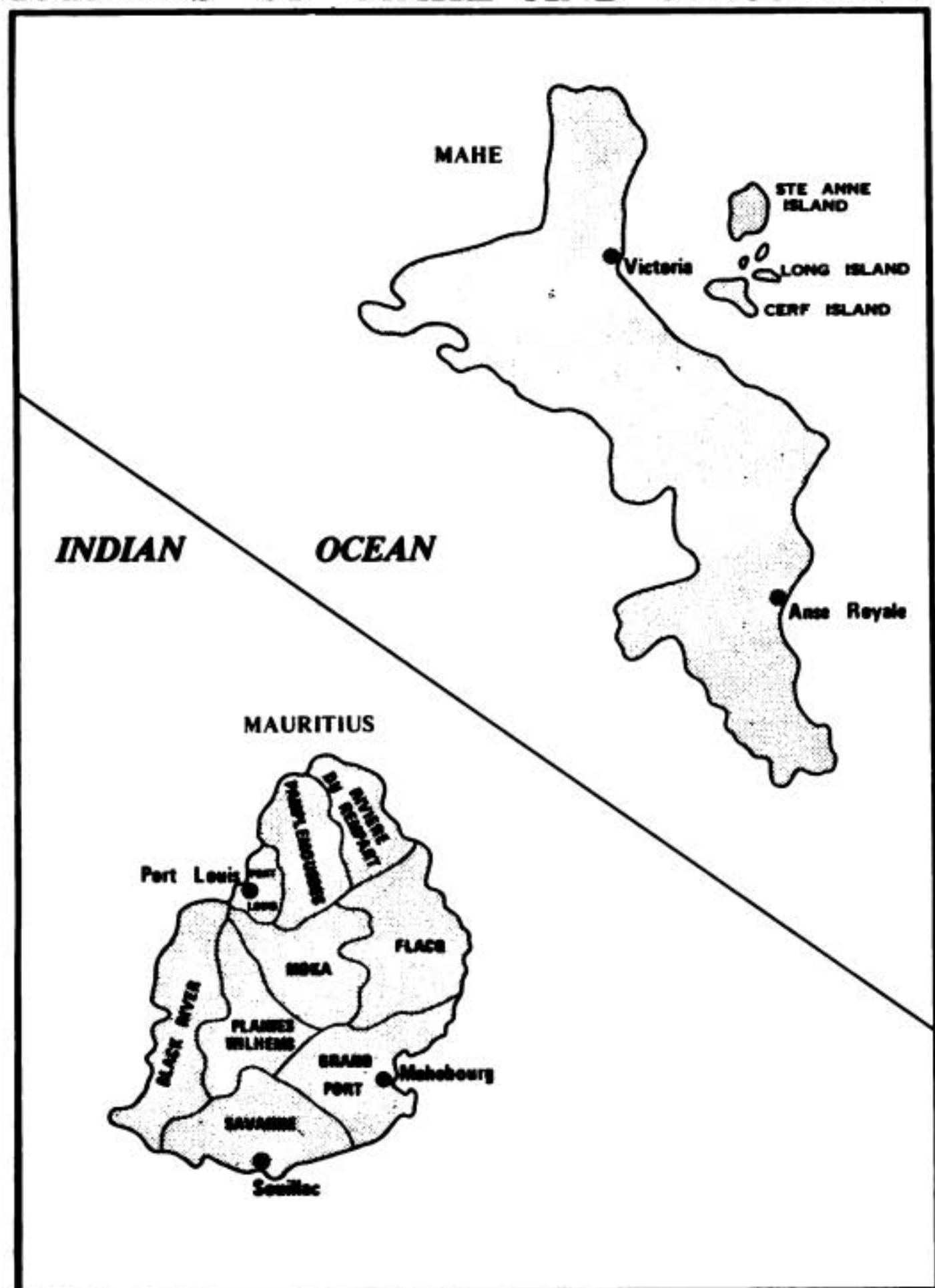
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# MAURITIUS AND THE SEYCHELLES



# ISLANDS OF MAHÉ AND MAURITIUS





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# **1**

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## **Introduction: An Overview**

Mauritius and the Seychelles are nations of immigrants, located in the western Indian Ocean. Today they are sovereign states separated by nearly a thousand miles, but their past histories had a good deal in common. The two countries were initially settled by Europeans who came as free immigrants and by Africans who came in chains. From about 1770 to 1810 the islands formed parts of the French colonial dependency in the western Indian Ocean. Britain captured the islands during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars; she administered their affairs from a common colonial capital from 1810 until 1903, when the Seychelles became a separate colony. Joint colonial administrations encouraged frequent intercourse between the inhabitants of Mauritius and the Seychelles, the sharing of common laws and institutions, and the cultivation of similar attitudes toward race relations. The two states were alike also in the way they responded to the problem of developing the agricultural resources of the sparsely settled lands, namely, by the importations of slaves, most of whom were blacks.

The introduction of blacks into Mauritius was initiated by the Dutch East India Company in the seventeenth century. When the Dutch abandoned the island in 1710, they left behind a few runaway slaves. France took nominal possession of the island in 1715 and started actual settlement half a dozen years later. The unruly nature of the maroons did not discourage the French settlers from importing slaves to aid them in the exploitation of the island's resources. During the French occupation, the blacks were imported in such numbers that by 1810 they constituted over two-thirds of the island's population. French settlement of the

Seychelles began in 1770. As was the case in Mauritius, the French found out that they could not do without slaves—in fact, black slaves were among the first settlers sent to the Seychelles from the Mascarenes. The slave trade was officially banned in the early years of British rule in Mauritius and the Seychelles, but the dependency of the planters on slave labor was such that an illicit slave trade continued for decades.

This study emphasizes the roles that peoples of African origin played in the settlement and the development of Mauritius and the Seychelles during both French and British colonial regimes, and compares the socioeconomic conditions of blacks during the two periods.

The study also examines the conditions and roles of blacks during the period, which began in the 1830s, when half-free labor replaced slave labor. The Abolition Act of 1833, aimed at ending slavery in the British empire, heralded the dawn of a new era in the relations of whites and blacks, but the imperial measure was viewed by the planters, whites and nonwhites alike, as a threat to their economic and social welfare. In order to avert economic disaster and to soothe the agitated nerves of the landed and slave proprietors, Britain sanctioned a short-term “apprenticeship”—a euphemism for servile labor—of the “emancipated” slaves to their “former” owners. The apprenticeship system was designed to last for four years for the domestic slaves and six years for the field workers, but events in the British West Indies hastened its termination in Mauritius and the Seychelles. When real emancipation was proclaimed early in 1839, the slaves left the sugar plantations in very large numbers, thereby aggravating the labor problem. Again the imperial power came to the rescue of the planters. This time it sanctioned the importation of indentured workers from the Indian subcontinent.

The large-scale use of Indian laborers worked an economic miracle of sorts in Mauritius: sugar became “king.” The robust health of the dominant commercial crop was nurtured by the exploitation of brown workers to the fullest extent possible, while

improvements in transport and communications made easier the exports of larger crop yields than before. The prosperity of the sugar industry had a wholesome effect on public revenues. An enlarged public treasury made possible the extension of such social services as education and health. The large-scale exploitation of cheap Indian labor, a response to blacks' "desertion" of the sugar estates, made it difficult for the blacks to return to the estates. The reduced dependence of whites on black labor and the vivid memories of past enslavement harbored by the blacks affected race relations: the eyes of the planters were averted from those of the blacks and the latter made the adjustments from slavery to freedom on their own, with minimal help from the planters and the often compliant colonial administration.

In the Seychelles, where no appreciable immigration of indentured labor offset the loss of slave labor, the problems of economic and social adjustments were aggravated by the sub-dependent status of the small, scattered islands. A number of expedients were tried to encourage the emancipated blacks and the "freed" recaptives landed in the Seychelles to work as "free" laborers, but the languished economy did not begin to stir until the widespread cultivation of the coconut and other less labor-intensive crops in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the post-emancipation period, socioeconomic conditions in Mauritius and the Seychelles diverged somewhat. As a result of large Indian immigration, the browns supplanted the blacks as the most numerous nonwhite inhabitants of Mauritius, and Mauritius became nominally an "Asian" country. In the Seychelles, on the other hand, the blacks still predominated in numbers. In both states, however, exaggerated beliefs in the "primacy" of color continued to feed on the heritage of slavery and on the master-servant relationships "sanctified" by custom and legislation. The post-emancipation period saw improvements in the general conditions of all racial components of the population and a certain measure of class mobility; however, as in the days of slavery, a person's social standing and "respectability" were measured not

so much by his personal worth and achievements as by the lightness or darkness of his skin color.



## **2**

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### **Before 1810**

#### **White Colonizers and Black Sinews**

It is not certain whether or not Mauritius and the Seychelles were inhabited before the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively. From very ancient times, traders from Arabia and the Indian subcontinent have navigated the Indian Ocean, and it is likely that they touched on these islands, or some of them, by accident or by design. Mauritius lies only 500 miles off the center of the east coast of Madagascar (now Malagasy Republic). The Indonesian emigrants who settled in Madagascar during the early centuries of the Christian era were probably aware of the existence of Mauritius, even if they did not live on the island. The Portuguese, the first modern Europeans to erupt into the Indian Ocean and to initiate prolonged European rivalries there, knew about Mauritius and sighted the Seychelles. Portuguese ships, driven by storms, occasionally took shelter in the former, their crew collecting fresh water and edible fruits from the forests of the island. If the visitors inhabited Mauritius and the Seychelles, they did not leave lasting marks on them. The permanent settlement of the islands and the foundation of their agricultural economies owed a great deal to the colonial initiative of the Dutch, the French and the British.

Dutch initiation of the peopling of Mauritius was the by-product of religious and political changes in Europe. After decades of bitter wars in the Spanish Netherlands (modern Belgium and Netherlands), in which the forces of militant Catholicism were pitted against the forces of uncompromising Protestantism, the inhabitants of the Northern Provinces of the Spanish Netherlands, now

known as the Dutch, had sufficiently trounced their opponents to establish their claim to religious freedom and political independence. Emboldened by their success, the Dutch set out to assert themselves on the world stage. One of their lucrative targets was the Portuguese spice trade. After the union of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns in 1580 in the person of Philip II of Spain, a union that was not dissolved until 1640, the Spanish monarch closed the Lisbon spice market to the Dutch as a part of its effort to crush Dutch assertion of independence. The strategy failed, for the Dutch struck out to the original sources of the spices themselves and eventually made Portugal pay for its union with Spain. In 1598, during their first bid to breach the Portuguese monopoly of trade and empire in the east, Dutch ships, buffeted by storms and winds, stumbled on to the southeastern part of Mauritius. The Dutch mariners rested there, explored the island as best they could, took some foodstuffs and valuable timber, and annexed the island; they named it Mauritius in honor of Maurice of Nassau, their Stadtholder. Subsequent visits followed, but it was not until the Dutch East India Company had wrested control of the Spice Islands from the Portuguese that the company decided to colonize Mauritius.

The first Dutch settlers, about twenty-six men in all, including the governor, arrived in the Grand Port district in the southeastern part of Mauritius in 1638. They were instructed to engage in agriculture, exploit the valuable timber resources of the island, provide rest and succor to Dutch sailors and sick men from Batavia, and prevent English and French ships from using the island.<sup>1</sup> The question of how a handful of men, nestled in one corner of an island of 720 square miles, could exercise effective surveillance over the entire island and prevent Dutch competitors from using it did not worry the directors of the company. The assignment was in conformity with the mercantilist thought and practices of the age. It was a relatively easy task when compared, for example, to the monopolistic trading rights that Charles II of England authorized the Royal African Company (chartered in

1672) to exercise over thousands of miles of the coastline of western Africa. The Dutch settlers tried to carry out the rest of their instructions. They built their houses, cultivated food crops, hunted and fished; they reared cattle and other domestic animals, and cut down ebony wood for the repair of Dutch ships and for sale in Europe. Within a few years of the founding of the settlement, the company realized that without the aid of additional labor the tiny colony would not prosper. The introduction of slaves was considered necessary to awaken the colony. In 1641 Van der Stel, governor of Mauritius from 1639 to 1645, imported a hundred captives from Madagascar. Many of the slaves escaped into the forests in the interior in order to avoid enslavement. In the forests they organized small communities according to the ideas that they had brought with them from their homeland. They lived by farming and hunting. From their hideouts they raided the Dutch settlement. More slaves were brought to Mauritius, but many of the slaves ran away to join the forest "outlaws." By the 1650s, the attacks of the maroons had become so disheartening that the Dutch company decided to abandon the settlement<sup>2</sup> and to transfer the settlers to the more promising "half-way house" planted at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. Before evacuating the settlers and the employees of the company, numbering about 100 and sixty respectively, the company ordered the destruction of the settlement—plantations, buildings, and all—to prevent it from being utilized by the English and the French who might try to occupy the island.<sup>3</sup>

The Dutch returned to Mauritius in 1664 and reoccupied the site of their former settlement. The colonists engaged in their familiar economic activities, particularly the felling and preparation of timber for export. They penetrated further into the interior than they had done before and spread around the coast. On the whole, however, they made little use of the central, southern and western parts of the island.<sup>4</sup> The colonists experienced many difficulties such as the ravages of drought and storms. To these problems were added the frequent depredations of the maroons, whose ranks were



reinforced from time to time by runaway slaves and by net population growth. In about 1694 the maroons burnt down the mud fort that the Dutch had erected at Grand Port and did great damage to the "town." The Dutch rebuilt the fort in stone,<sup>5</sup> but the sturdy edifice could not inspire confidence in a small community already demoralized by a hostile environment and by unsubdued maroons. On the part of the Dutch East India Company itself, there was hardly much to inspire confidence. The settlers sent valuable cargoes of ebony wood to Europe and sizable quantities of meat, arrack (a liquor brewed from sugar) and soap, but the cost of supplying the colony with slaves, tools and even foodstuffs from the Cape of Good Hope outweighed the advantages of an increasingly burdensome establishment.<sup>6</sup> The company decided, therefore, to evacuate Mauritius for good. It did so in 1710, leaving the maroons in possession of the land as the "first indigenes," a claim that the French, the European successors of the Dutch, would later contest.

France annexed Mauritius in 1715 and renamed it Ile de France, but she did nothing about it until six years later. In December of 1721 an advance party from Bourbon, a neighboring island that the French had colonized in the seventeenth century, landed at what is now Port Louis to prepare the way for French settlers. During the early part of the following year, settlers selected from French families in Bourbon arrived and the advance party returned to Bourbon. The seat of government was at Grand Port, but by 1735 it had been transferred to Port Louis. The colonial experiment was under the direction of the French East India Company; it was probably pursued energetically, for P. J. Barnwell and A. Tous-saint state in their *A Short History of Mauritius* that after one year of French occupation Ile de France had "as many people living in it as the Dutch after forty years, a governor chosen by the King of France, employees of the French East India Company . . . planters, slaves, and two regiments of French soldiers."<sup>7</sup> In numerical terms, the French achievement seemed very impressive, but the French settlers were hardly in better circumstances than their



Dutch counterpart with respect to food production and the enjoyment of reasonable security. Food was frequently so scarce that the French colonists had to supplement their arable harvests with the proceeds of the chase and fishing and the collection of edible fruits and roots.<sup>8</sup> The forests were still inhabited by the indomitable slave maroons, who struck as much terror into French hearts as they had into the hearts of their Dutch predecessors. Serious attempts to solve these problems did not really start until the arrival in 1735 of the able administrator Bertrand François Mahé de La Bourdonnais as governor of Bourbon and Ile de France. Before his appointment as governor of the Mascarenes, he had served as an employee of the French East India Company; after leaving the company's service, he had traded successfully on his own account.

The governorship of La Bourdonnais, which lasted until 1746, was significant in many respects. He encouraged the settlers to raise more food to feed themselves and for export. He resurrected the culture of sugar cane that the Dutch had introduced into Mauritius, and stimulated the cultivation of cotton, indigo and coffee. He attracted additional settlers from Bourbon when he made Port Louis the seat of the Central Administration, and stimulated the importation of more slaves. Before his arrival the French imported their slaves from Madagascar and intermittently from the African mainland. From the late 1730s, however, Bourbon and Ile de France purchased most of their slaves from Portuguese East Africa (now the independent Republic of Mozambique).<sup>9</sup> So successful was La Bourdonnais' policy that the number of white settlers in Ile de France increased from 200 in 1735 to 600 in 1739, while the slave population increased from 600 in 1735 to over 3,000 in 1739. More slaves were imported in subsequent decades from Mozambique in spite of Portugal's prohibition of trade between the Portuguese and other European nationals. The French were able to circumvent the ban because of their ability to sweeten the hearts of the ill-paid and corrupt Portuguese officials with specie, a commodity in scarce supply in the Portuguese territories, and because of the opportunity that the French gave the Portuguese

officials to enrich themselves personally. An additional factor favoring Portuguese willingness to sell slaves to the French has been suggested by Edward Alpers. In his *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*, he states that the French were in a position to provide the barren Mozambique island with "a regular supply of grains, and thereby to free the Portuguese somewhat from relying for foodstuffs exclusively upon their mainland holdings, which were always vulnerable from attack from the Makua."<sup>10</sup>

Besides providing the stimulus that made French slaving in Ile de France a profitable enterprise, La Bourdonnais was also instrumental in containing the maroons, thereby making it easier for the French planters and peasant cultivators to engage in their economic pursuits. Derek Hollingworth, author of the book *They Came to Mauritius*, has summarized the problem of the maroons as follows:

Public security was endangered by the presence of bands of runaways or maroons who lurked in the forest, a constant menace to the scattered and solitary farmsteads. It was not unknown for colonists to abandon their holdings owing to attacks by maroons, and a French priest, who had visited the island in 1732, reported that no journey could be made into the interior without escort. The settlements at Port Louis and Grand Port offered little security, for the visitor tells us that during his stay a servant who had gone to draw water from a spring only two hundred yards from his lodgings in Port Louis was murdered by a gang of maroons. The chances of reprisal were slender in such densely wooded country and once the maroons had withdrawn to their secret hiding-places they ran little chance of capture.<sup>11</sup>

La Bourdonnais attacked the problem vigorously. Some French soldiers were released from ordinary garrison duties and assigned to patrol the forests and the seashores. In 1736 he imported expert forest hunters from Bourbon to train soldiers in jungle warfare and to accompany the soldiers in their mission to hunt down the maroons. In spite of these measures, the problem of containing the maroons would probably have lasted longer if he had not hit upon the clever idea of training some of the slaves belonging to the French East India Company as a special police force and setting them against the maroons. These "thieves" set to "catch



thieves," as one author put it, were rewarded according to their performances.<sup>12</sup> The black police performed their tasks so well that La Bourdonnais claimed in 1740 that there were not more than twenty male maroons in the whole island.<sup>13</sup> The claim was probably exaggerated, for there was no head count of the surviving maroons, but the runaways had been chastised enough to withdraw deeper into the forests.

The governorship of La Bourdonnais saw the utilization of the black slaves in other ways. Slaves trained by him helped him to carry out his public works projects, such as the construction of forts, batteries and hospitals in Port Louis, and the building of an aqueduct to bring water to the town from a distance of two miles. The facilities that both white and slave artisans helped him to construct made it possible for ships to be built or repaired at "Port Louis as at any other port in the east."<sup>14</sup> The slaves were employed as miners and in sugar factories. At Pamplémousses, Villebaque, and other places to the northeast and east of Port Louis, slaves were worked in the surface mines of iron ore that the Dutch had discovered but probably did not exploit. It is said that at one time almost a thousand slaves were employed in the Pamplémousses mine, and that the sugar works produced in 1750 a revenue of sixty thousand livres to the French East India Company.<sup>15</sup> Further, the slaves were even used in military campaigns. During the War of Austrian Succession, when hostilities between France and England were extended to India, La Bourdonnais raised companies of white and slave troops. With these he sailed to India in 1746 to relieve Pondicherry and to force the British to surrender Madras.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, La Bourdonnais contributed to the strengthening of the French presence in the western Indian Ocean by sending out French explorers to explore islands far away to the north of Ile de France. An expedition under Lazare Picault was sent out in 1742 and 1743. The exploration resulted in the French "discovery" of a group of islands that they named collectively Séchelles, after Moreau de Séchelles, a French minister; the largest of the islands was named Mahé after La Bourdonnais. La Bourdonnais claimed

the islands for France. Although nothing was done about them for several decades, the islands, now known as the Seychelles, provided after 1770 further outlets for French colonization. When he left Ile de France, La Bourdonnais left it a strong base of French colonial power in the western Indian Ocean, a foundation upon which his successors built. When France was defeated by England in the Seven Years' War, and she lost her major territorial holdings in India, it was to Ile de France that the displaced Frenchmen flocked. The Seven Years' War caused the French East India Company such heavy financial losses that its directors were forced to hand the governance of the island back to the French Crown, but many of the company's officials and employees stayed behind and contributed to the island's development and prosperity.

The period of direct royal administration of Ile de France lasted from 1767 to 1790 and was marked by important changes. In the days of the French East India Company, the colonial administration was headed by a governor; now it was headed by two officials, the governor and the *intendant*. The governor was in charge of political matters and controlled the military establishment, while the *intendant* supervised the finances and was in charge of agriculture. Much more significant, perhaps, than the administrative changes was the lifting in 1769 of the monopoly of trade hitherto enjoyed by the French East India Company. The liberation of trade spurred on commercial speculation and expansion.

One of the Frenchmen who took advantage of the liberalization of trade was Monsieur Morice, a trader from Ile de France. Morice was one of the first French traders to carry French slaving beyond the East African coastline claimed by the Portuguese. After a careful commercial reconnaissance conducted in 1775 and 1776, he concluded that Kilwa, rather than Zanzibar, was the best spot for developing his trade in slaves. In the closing months of 1776, he signed a hundred-year treaty with the Sultan of Kilwa, giving Morice the right to buy 1,000 slaves a year at twenty piastres (dollars) each, the Sultan receiving a commission of two piastres on each slave exported. Until Morice filled his quota, no other



Frenchman was to be allowed by the Sultan to purchase slaves from Kilwa.<sup>17</sup> Morice was not satisfied with making Kilwa just a slave depot for the Mascarenes; he also had plans to convert the town into a base for French colonial expansion on the mainland of East Africa. He tried to interest the French imperial authorities in the colonial venture, but the French government declined to approve his scheme in order to promote cordial and profitable commercial relations with the ruler of Oman, who regarded Kilwa as part of his hereditary possessions. The "influence-extension" scheme of Morice was also foiled by the Omani Sultan's reestablishment of Omani overlordship over Kilwa, an overlordship that Kilwa had renounced in about 1770.<sup>18</sup> Morice did not live long enough to enjoy his slave-trading monopoly, for he died in the early 1780s. Before his death, however, he had reaped large profits from exporting thousands of slaves to the Mascarenes as well as to the French possessions in the West Indies via the Cape of Good Hope; he had also demonstrated the lucrativeness of the slave trade north of Cape Delgado, the northern limit of the territories claimed by Portugal in East Africa.

Other French merchants followed in Morice's steps. Their slave imports into Ile de France helped not only to replenish the losses in the slave population caused by the ravages of slavery and by natural calamities, but also to swell the slave population itself. In 1767 there were only 15,027 slaves on the island, but by 1777 and 1787 the number had risen to 25,154 and 33,832 respectively.<sup>19</sup> The doubling of the slave population during the two decades—the result of fresh importations rather than natural increase—enabled the planters to increase the acreage of land under cultivation and the output of export staples, namely, coffee, cotton, indigo and sugar. The profitable expansion of agriculture and of commerce brought an influx of white settlers from France. There was also a marked increase in the population of people of mixed black and white ancestry, variously called "Free Blacks" or "Free Persons of Colour." In 1767 they numbered only 587. By 1787 their number had risen to 2,235. The increase was due partly to natural

increase and partly to emancipation from slavery.<sup>20</sup> It is not clear how many slaves were manumitted by the "benevolence" of their masters, and how many purchased their freedom. Since the "Free Persons of Colour" inherited little or no property from their "benefactors," they had to work very hard to share, if they did share, in the growing prosperity of the period.

The period of Crown government also saw French occupation of the Seychelles. Today the Seychelles comprise over eighty-two islands, scattered over an area of some 150,000 square miles of the western Indian Ocean. The total land area is about a hundred square miles. Mahé, the largest island, occupies an area of about fifty-five square miles. Praslin, to the north of Mahé, is the second largest island, with an area under twenty square miles. Many islands are small, some so small that they have been described as "mere rocks" protruding slightly above the sea.<sup>21</sup> The French settled in only a few of the islands. Their occupation began in 1770. In the month of August of that year, fourteen white men (including a commandant, a surgeon and a chief carpenter), seven black slaves, five Indians, and another person described as a "negress,"<sup>22</sup> arrived from the Mascarenes to found a subcolony ruled from Ile de France. The dependent status was maintained by the British and it was not until 1903 that the Seychelles attained the status of a separate colony.

At first the French settlers engaged in very little cultivation and concentrated their energies on the exploitation of the natural resources of the lands—timber, turtles and tortoises—for sale. Pierre Poivre, the first *intendant* of Ile de France, had great dreams about wresting the spice trade from the Dutch. He imported spices from the Dutch East Indies for cultivation in Ile de France. Because the crops did not do very well, he sent fresh seedlings to be planted in Mahé. Despite his encouragement and the support of his executive colleague, Governor Jean Daniel Dumas, the settlement made very slow progress. There was much bickering among the white colonists, and the labor force was very small. The culture of spices was a failure. The few trees that were planted in the King's Garden



at Anse Royale on the east coast of Mahé were raided by the slaves who had become maroons.<sup>23</sup> The resumption of hostilities between France and England during the War of American Independence finished off what was left of the Royal Garden. It is said that the French commandant mistook a ship approaching Mahé for an English vessel and ordered the garden destroyed. The idea was to prevent the English from seeing something useful to tempt them to seize Mahé. As it turned out, the ship was a French slaver bringing slaves to Mahé.<sup>24</sup>

Things improved in the 1780s. More slaves were imported for use in the Seychelles and for reexport to Ile de France. Tortoises, turtles, salted and dried fish, and some coconut oil were also exported. Under the direction of Commandant de Malavois, a shift was made from undue exploitation of the natural resources to profitable agriculture. De Malavois had visited the Seychelles in 1786-87 before being appointed the commandant in 1788, with extensive powers. Malavois planned to regularize the granting of concessions with an eye to attracting settlers to engage in agriculture. He apportioned the land in blocks, called "habitations." A habitation consisted of 108 arpents, about 112 acres. Several heads of white families got extensive concessions. In 1791 Hangard, who arrived in the Seychelles in the 1770s, possessed 388 arpents and 140 slaves. Another planter had 579 arpents, while one Vaulbert family was established at Praslin with two properties of 432 and 108 arpents.<sup>25</sup> A few "Free Blacks" seemed to have acquired smaller properties.<sup>26</sup> The census taken in 1801 or 1803-4, listed a total population of 2,121 persons, broken down as follows: 215 whites, 86 "Coloureds" and 1,820 slaves.<sup>27</sup> The census contained the following economic data: 2,467 arpents of land were planted with maize, manioc, sweet potatoes, rice and vegetables; 666 arpents, with cotton; 128 arpents, with sugar; and 2,000 and 1,000 arpents, with clove and coffee trees respectively. About 4,534 arpents of land were uncultivated. The inhabitants owned 250 cattle, 350 sheep and goats, and 812 pigs.<sup>28</sup> The food crops yielded sizable surpluses, some of which were sold to ships calling at

Mahé; the rest of the surplus was shipped to Ile de France for sale there or for reexport. With respect to the sale of "cash crops," the export of cotton was perhaps the most profitable. During the first few years of British control of the islands, the Seychelles exported to Mauritius over 1,300 bales of cotton, weighing between 375,000 and 400,000 pounds.<sup>29</sup>

By the end of the French period of Seychelles' history (1810), it may be said that the Seychelles colonization gamble had paid off. In both Mauritius and the Seychelles, a combination of French capital and black labor had created viable settlements, but the rewards of the "joint" enterprise were distributed very unevenly.

### The Color Line

Society in Mauritius and the Seychelles was one in which skin color was a rough indicator of legal status and a pervasive index of social "respectability." The society was composed, as indicated in the foregoing discussion, of peoples of varied origins and different personal circumstances. Among the white inhabitants there were administrative officials and their staff, planters, soldiers, ex-military and ex-naval personnel, and a sprinkling of priests. There were rich and poor Frenchmen, but their white skins stamped on them a badge of "superiority." The nonwhites were also a varied lot. Those designated as "Free Persons of Colour" or "Free Blacks" were descended not only from the mixture of whites and blacks, but also from the mixture of blacks and the few Asians—mostly Indian house servants from Pondicherry, engaged to serve a number of years, and artisans—who resided in the colony. Although some of the "Coloureds" were slaves, the tendency to use the terms *Coloureds* and *Free Blacks* interchangeably in contemporary literature indicates that the possession of "fair" but nonwhite skin was a presumption of freedom, entitling the owner to a middle position in society. The slaves originated in diverse parts of Africa. Some came from as far away as West



Africa.<sup>30</sup> Most of them came from the mainland of eastern Africa and Madagascar. Although the slave population also included Indians and Malaysians,<sup>31</sup> the possession of "dark" skin was almost invariably a sign that one was a slave and at the bottom of society.

The color line was laid down as early as 1723. In December of that year a royal edict was issued to regulate the relations between the white and nonwhite subjects of the King of France in Ile de France and its dependencies, and between free men and slaves in the colony. Popularly known as *code noir* (Black Code), the edict forbade the King's white subjects of either sex to marry blacks "under pain of punishment and arbitrary fine," and forbade priests to marry them. Whites were forbidden to have slave concubines or to have children from such cohabitation. If the illicit union resulted in an issue, the father of the child was liable to pay a fine of three hundred livres; if the mother of the child was the man's slave, the slave was to be taken away from him and the child condemned to the perpetual wardship of the state hospital without the benefit of manumission.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of the official ban on interracial marriages and cohabitation, the population of "Free Blacks" grew. One contributory factor to the growth was the imbalance in the sex ratios. Throughout the period of French rule in Ile de France and its dependencies, and continuing into a great part of the nineteenth century, there were more men than women among the different sections of the immigrant population. Living far away from France and with few white women nearby, the white settlers were compelled by sexual urges to turn to black women, whether free or slave, for satisfaction. The result was miscegenation. Another factor was the concession that free black fathers could breed free children with their slave concubines under certain conditions. The same restrictions that were imposed on white males with respect to cohabitation with slaves applied to blacks, but when a free black father married his slave concubine, the woman became free; the children born to them during the concubinage became free and legitimate as well. The blacks increased in number by the excess of births over deaths.

Other factors contributing to their growth were the rule that slave fathers and free women begat free children, and the provision for emancipation. Slave owners, twenty-five years of age and above, could emancipate their slaves after obtaining official permission to do so. Manumissions granted without official sanction were deemed illegal and were to be punished by the loss of the slaves to the slave owner. Lastly, there was a curious provision that the slaves who were appointed by their masters as tutors of the masters' children were "to be held and reputed . . . to be manumitted slaves." Because it was very rare to see a slave with "formal" education—schools did not exist in the colony until the closing decades of the eighteenth century,<sup>33</sup> and slave owners were apprehensive of the "dangerous" ideas that slaves might acquire through formal education—this concession was of little practical value.

Regardless of the methods by which the "Free Black" population grew, the "Free Blacks" were subjected to several disabilities. Manumitted slaves could not inherit properties from their former owners; they were enjoined to bear "a marked respect towards their old masters, their widows, and their children, so that the injury they may ever do to them should be punished more severely than if it were done to any other person . . . ." Article 8 of the Ordinance of September 29, 1767, passed by Governor Dumas and *Intendant* Poivre to modify certain provisions of the Edict of December 1723, forbade "Free Blacks" as well as slaves and Indians to gamble or to assemble for the purpose of gambling for money. Those who infringed on the ordinance could be placed in the stocks or whipped and could lose the money used in gambling; they could also lose the money found on them even if the money was not used for gambling.<sup>34</sup> It is not difficult to understand the reason why the slaves were not permitted to gamble for money—they might steal money from their masters to support the habit. What is difficult to understand is why "Free Persons of Colour" and Asians were forbidden to gamble. Perhaps there were virtues in gambling that the colonial authorities wanted only whites to share!



The Black Code imposed differential penalties on whites and "Free Blacks" who harbored fugitive slaves. The whites paid a fine of three dollars for each day that they sheltered runaway slaves, but "Free Blacks" were required to pay the owner of the slaves a fine of ten dollars for each day that the slaves were harbored; if the offending "Free Blacks" were unable to pay the fine, they could be reduced to slavery and sold, the state hospital being entitled to receive the amount by which the proceeds of the sale exceeded the amount of the fine. Manumitted slaves could be put to death for certain categories of robbery. "Free Blacks" were not permitted to reside in Port Louis, but in a special suburb called Black Town. It is said that a "Free Person of Colour" who failed to bow to a white man he met on the street could be whipped by the police!<sup>35</sup> When schools were finally established, "Free Persons of Colour" were barred from attending the same schools as white persons. Places of amusement and even graves were segregated. The only interlude of rough equality between whites and "Free Blacks" occurred during the period 1791-1803, when the latter were given representation in the Colonial Assembly established by the white settlers in sympathetic compliance with the Revolutionary measures taken in France itself. Even in this case, effective power was in the hands of persons of "lily white blood."<sup>36</sup> During this period also, whites and "Free Persons of Colour" served in separate units of the militia.

As harsh as the disabilities and indignities suffered by the "Free Blacks" were, they pale into relative insignificance when compared to the conditions of the slaves. The framers of the fundamental slave law recognized that a slave, like any other person, had certain physical wants to satisfy in order to survive; the lawmakers even conceded that the slave had a soul worthy of being saved. Slave owners were, therefore, enjoined to give their slaves food rations weekly and clothing annually, and to support them generally. Slaves were to be instructed in the Catholic faith—the official and the only authorized religion in Ile de France and its dependencies—and baptized after they had acquired sufficient knowledge of the basic doctrines of the Catholic Church. Baptized

slaves who died were entitled to burial in consecrated ground, albeit in segregated graves, but unbaptized deceased slaves were to be buried "at night in some field adjoining the place of their death." The latter provision was perhaps intended to make the dead slaves pay for their extinguished "pagan" existence and to encourage those living to be more mindful of their spiritual welfare. This plausible suggestion is strengthened by another injunction to slave owners, that only those slaves who had professed the Catholic faith should be appointed to supervise other slaves, and by the provision that slaves should not be worked on Sundays and on holy days, although they could be sent to market or buy things on such days. It would seem, however, that religion was also viewed as an instrument of control, for priests were expressly forbidden to solemnize the marriages of slaves without the explicit consent of their masters. The Black Code also made some concession to the slave family as an institution. It stipulated that, while slaves could be sold, a husband, his wife, and their children below the age of puberty should be sold together in one lot.

The concessions made to the slaves were more than counterbalanced by the legal and other disabilities imposed on them. The slaves were the object of transactions of various kinds. As chattels, they could be sold, mortgaged, inherited, transferred in settlement of debt and used as "stores of wealth." They were stripped of the right to own property by the provision that they could possess "nothing that shall not belong to their masters," including gifts from other persons. Without the permission of their masters, they could not engage in any economic activity that might benefit them personally. Slaves were forbidden to display merchandise for sale in the market without the express permission of their masters. They could not hold public offices nor act as agents for persons other than their masters. Except for the "right" to complain to the appropriate legal officer about their masters' failure to feed them and care for them in general, they did not enjoy any legal rights. They could not sue in court for redress of grievances, nor could they be witnesses in civil or criminal cases, "unless required as



indispensable witnesses, and merely in default of white people," and "in no case" could they testify for or against their masters. Slaves could not carry arms or large sticks without the permission of their masters. To strengthen "public" security, the law also forbade the slaves belonging to different masters "to join together" at any time. The punishment for "conspiratorial assemblies" was branding; for repeated "conspiracies" and for other "aggravating circumstances," the slaves could be executed.

Besides stripping slaves of basic human rights, the slave law subjected them to a regime of rigorous punishments. A slave that struck his owner, the spouse of his owner, or the children of the couple in the face was to be condemned to death. A similar punishment awaited other slaves who struck the persons just enumerated, causing them a wound or to shed blood. Violent acts committed by slaves against free persons were severely punished, sometimes with death. Slaves could be flogged, and could be put to death if the circumstances warranted it, for stealing horses, mules and cattle. The punishments meted out to fugitive slaves were very severe. A fugitive slave, recovered a month after his master had notified the proper authorities of the slave's escape, was to be branded on one shoulder and suffer the loss of his ears. For a second offense of the same duration, the slave's hamstrings were to be cut and his other shoulder was to be branded. For a third offense, the fugitive was put to death, adequate compensation being paid to the slave's owner for the lost "capital." Fugitive or maroon slaves were shot for resisting arrest, the owner of the slave being compensated as usual for his lost "property."

It may be argued that the penal sanctions described above were no more severe than the punishments given for various categories of offenses in Europe of the same period. The shooting of maroons as a sport—like the example witnessed by the French engineer Saint-Pierre during his sojourn in Mauritius from 1768 to 1770<sup>37</sup>—was comparable, for example, to English landowners' practice of setting up spring guns on their landed estates in order to break the bones and mutilate the limbs of game poachers. The

flogging or hanging of the slaves who stole things in Mauritius and the Seychelles was no more severe than the execution of free men in Europe for such offenses as shoplifting. The flogging of plantation or domestic slaves in the French colony was "not harsher" than the flogging of English seamen. In terms of type and severity, the punishment of offenders in the colony, on the one hand, and in Europe, on the other hand, might be comparable. There was, however, a significant difference: in the latter place, the scales of punishment reflected, as they did elsewhere in the world, class prejudices; in the former place, the sanctions were based on color differentiation.

One might also want to know the extent to which private practices differed from official prescriptions. Were there no kind masters solicitous of the welfare of their slaves, even if they could not set their slaves free? In the punishment of slaves, was brutality the rule rather than the occasional exception? The evidence suggests that there were occasions of less inhumanity—because the essence of slavery is inhumanity, there can be no such thing as enlightened slavery—but generally the lot of the slaves mirrored and sometimes exceeded the draconian provisions of the slave law.

By 1767 the evasions of the concessions to the slaves had become so glaring that Governor Dumas and *Intendant* Poivre were compelled to pass an ordinance to revive the Edict of 1723 and to modify some of its provisions. Slave masters were reminded of their duty to feed their slaves properly. Article 14 of the Ordinance of 1767 states:

Experience having taught that a Slave could not be properly fed with less than two pounds of Indian corn per day, masters are ordered to furnish them that quantity of sustenance, whether in grain of the above nature, or any other equivalent species of provisions, both as to quantity and quality, such as rice, cassava, beans and potatoes.<sup>38</sup>

The owners of slaves were required "to furnish every year the clothing necessary for the slaves," as far as circumstances might permit; they were forbidden to inflict more than thirty lashes on



slaves without the permission of the person in charge of the police department. If the latter considered that the offense committed by the slave merited more than thirty lashes, the official would fix the number of lashes that the slaves would receive; the flogging of the slave would then take place on the quay.<sup>39</sup> When Pierre Poivre assumed the office of *intendant* in 1767, he observed that "the negro was considered as little beyond a mere instrument of cultivation, and was deemed unworthy of the slightest regard on the part of the proprietor."<sup>40</sup> When he left office, and subsequently, the French settler scarcely thought of the slaves as more than breathing, productive "hands."

In 1794 Revolutionary France passed a law outlawing slavery in the French empire and ordering the immediate liberation of the slaves. When the news reached Ile de France and the Seychelles, the French settlers considered it an act of revolutionary madness and vowed to have nothing to do with it. The French government sent two thousand troops and sailors and two representatives of the government to enforce the law. The expedition arrived in June 1796, but the two officials were harried out of the colony. From 1794 until 1803, the colony remained, as Barnwell and Toussaint put it, virtually a rebel colony.<sup>41</sup> The rebellion ended in 1803 when General Decaen, representing the Napoleonic government, reimposed obedience to French edicts. During the preceding twelve years, the French colonists had enjoyed practical self-government. The regime of Decaen extinguished their autonomy, but Napoleon's reinstatement of the institution of slavery was loudly cheered. Unfortunately, however, the cheer did not last very long, for Britain captured the French possessions in 1810. In 1814 she returned Bourbon (later renamed Réunion) to France, but retained Mauritius and the Seychelles. The optimism of the first decade of the nineteenth century had been replaced by grave uncertainties about the future. What would become of Frenchmen and French culture under British rule? Not less important, what would the British do about the economy of a new colony so dependent on slavery?

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## **Socioeconomic Conditions during the Early Decades of British Rule**

### **The Demand for Slaves**

The early years of British rule in Mauritius and the Seychelles were marked by great resentment and suspicion on the part of the French settlers. The capitulations that their leaders signed, surrendering the islands to Britain, “granted” them things dearest to their hearts, namely, the enjoyment of their French language, the practice of their Catholic faith and the maintenance of their institutions. The “guarantees” appeared generous, but they could not satisfy the proud Frenchmen smarting under defeat. The constitution of the colonial government on the assumption of British rule illustrated forcefully the change that had taken place. General Decaen’s seat was now occupied by the British governor. The governor was assisted by a hierarchy of top colonial officials, all Britons. At strategic points, units of the imperial army, commanded by officers with shining medals and other decorations, symbolized British power. The Frenchmen “brought up the rear”—they occupied the lowest civil and judicial posts. The change, or the “revolution,” disturbed them greatly. Many questions crossed their minds over and over again. How firm and how lasting were the guarantees that victors gave to the vanquished? Would the imperial elite that had just superimposed itself on the old French upper class maintain the “time-encrusted” social order hitherto maintained and propped by the labors of the racially “inferior” nonwhites? Would the leading industrial power that had gone abolitionist in the matter of sea-borne slave trade after pocketing (and still pocketing, albeit in

smaller amounts) the fruits of slavery, permit them to import slaves necessary for rebuilding their economy dislocated by Britain's blockade of Mauritius from 1808 to 1810? Unable to foresee satisfactory solutions to the twin problems of retaining French nationality under alien rule and of sustaining their socioeconomic well-being, thousands of them quit the colony for France, their places being partially filled by British merchants, planters and professional men. Many more would probably have followed the example of the *émigrés* if Sir Robert Farquhar, governor of Mauritius and its dependencies from 1810 to 1817 and from 1820-23, had not been conciliatory in his policies.

The task of Farquhar was a delicate one. As the representative of the British Crown, it was his duty to uphold British authority and insure compliance with British laws, including the Abolition Act of 1807, which made the importation of slaves into British territories illegal. But enforcing the Abolition Act seemed to him to run counter to British assurances, under the capitulations, that French institutions, which included slavery and slave trading, would be maintained in the colony. If he enforced the Abolition Act and succeeded in stopping the flow of slave supplies, what would happen to the plantation economy of the colony? His task was not made easier by other considerations. How would he convince his hard-pressed political wards that to import slaves into the colony was wrong and illegal, but that to sell those already imported as well as the slaves bred internally was proper and legal? After weighing carefully the issues involved, he decided to please the British Government and the planters at the same time—he would enforce the Abolition Act, but he would ask for a temporary postponement of the execution of the law.

In February 1811 Farquhar wrote a dispatch to Lord Liverpool, Secretary of State for the Colonies, on the state of Mauritius's economy. He reported that there was a grave shortage of labor on the island as a result of the British blockade and of natural disasters that killed many laborers. Because of the shortage, the prices paid for slaves had gone up and many employers could not afford to hire



laborers at the inflated rates. Moreover, free labor was so scarce as to be practically nonexistent. If adequate labor, or some other effective substitute, was not forthcoming, the economy would suffer, the planters would become desperate and mass suffering would ensue.<sup>1</sup> He suggested that the institution of slavery and slave trading in the colony were insured by the capitulations. Even if the capitulations did not cover slave trading, he understood that the British government had, notwithstanding the Abolition act, permitted one of the British West Indian islands to import slaves, and he thought that a British law passed prior to the acquisition of a colony would not apply to that colony after its acquisition unless there was a clause in the law making it applicable. Because the situation called for urgent corrective action, he concluded the dispatch with a request for prompt instructions.

When Lord Liverpool read the dispatch, he could scarcely believe its contents. In his reply dated May 2, 1811, he expressed great surprise that Farquhar could have thought that a law of such import as the Abolition Act would apply to the older colonies of Britain and not to the new ones. He asked Farquhar not only to enforce compliance with the law, but also to see that those persons who had illegally imported slaves into the colony were punished. With respect to the institution of slavery, the colonial secretary said that, while measures might be adopted to "improve" the conditions of slavery in all British colonies, the British Parliament had never intended "to make any great or sudden change in this respect," which would be "as inconsistent with the real interests of the slaves, as with what is due to the rights of those who, under the existing laws, have become their masters."

Lord Liverpool's dispatch clarified the position of the British government with respect to the sea-borne slave trade, but it failed to suggest alternative sources of labor. It was obvious to Farquhar that the planters and other users of slave labor would not obey the abolition law, and that those caught and convicted for disobeying the law might suffer. He sympathized with their plight and did what he could to prevent them from breaking the law. He posted a

government agent at the Seychelles. The agent arrived there in June 1811. He served as an all-purpose officer: he supervised local administration in the islands; he was the customs officer and had to see that slaves were not illicitly smuggled into the islands or out of the islands to Mauritius. In Mauritius, Farquhar took several precautions. Government officials were encouraged to help in the prevention of slave smuggling. He placed government vessels at the disposal of the British warships, charged with the task of patrolling the high seas and hunting down slave smugglers. The vessels were intended to enable the much larger British men-of-war to search the nooks and corners of Mauritius's coast and to apprehend slave importers found hiding in them. Before 1813 the planters had interpreted the oversight in publishing the Abolition Act in the colony as confirming their "right" under the capitulations to engage in the slave trade. Farquhar corrected the oversight in 1813. In April 1814 he issued a proclamation authorizing an annual compilation of the names of all blacks in the colony; the compiled lists were to be added to tax rolls. By comparing the census of one year with that of another year, it was hoped that illegal additions to the slave population would be detected. The plan was implemented until it was superseded by the Order in Council of September 1814. The Order in Council provided for the establishment of a slave registry office, for the appointment of a registrar, and for triennial returns after the completion of the first census. The Order in Council came into force in April 1815, but the first census was not completed until 1816.

Neither Farquhar's measures nor the patrols of the British warships deterred those interested in the continuation of the slave trade from engaging in the traffic. They considered the stakes too high for them to forgo illicit importations of slaves. From experience, the planters had learned that a certain level of work force had to be maintained in order to keep their businesses afloat. According to the tax rolls, there were 60,000 slaves in Mauritius when General Decaen surrendered the island to the British. There is reason to believe, however, that there were more slaves in the island than the



number recorded on the tax rolls. According to Farquhar, Decaen left a minute in his own handwriting stating that there were more than 80,000 slaves at the time of Britain's capture of Mauritius.<sup>2</sup> A similar discrepancy occurs in the parallel returns of the slave proprietors and the returns from the office of the collector of internal revenue for the years 1811-14. According to the former, there were 53,060 slaves in the year 1811, 44,090 slaves in 1812, 47,931 slaves in 1813, and 53,977 slaves in 1814. The tax rolls show, however, that the numbers of slaves for the corresponding years were 61,918, 60,817, 61,365 and 62,927.<sup>3</sup> The differences in the two sets of figures are explained by the unwillingness of the slave proprietors to pay capitation taxes on unproductive slaves—the aged, the infirm and the very young; the differences also indicate the extent to which slave owners depended on fresh importations of slaves to make up for the losses in the absolute number of slaves and to insure the means of supporting the non-productive ones. With a proportion of nonproductive slaves ranging from fourteen to twenty-five percent, in a situation where male slaves greatly outnumbered female slaves and intensive inbreeding of slaves was not possible, the planters reckoned that compliance with British abolition laws would spell their economic ruin. Their reply to Lord Liverpool's refusal to bend the law in their favor, or to provide free workmen, was an extensive resort to illicit traffic in slaves.

The slave traders employed numerous vessels, some capable of carrying up to 400 slaves, in conveying slaves from the coast of eastern Africa to the colony. Sometimes the slaves were brought straight from the African mainland, Zanzibar and the Comoro islands to Mauritius. At other times the slave traders would make a discreet stop on the western side of Madagascar; the slaves would then be passed through in relays to Tamatave or other points on the east coast. From there, smaller and more crowded vessels would convey the slaves to Mauritius.<sup>4</sup> Besides Mauritians, Europeans, Arabs and Africans made use of Madagascar as a conduit for the slaves smuggled into the Mascarenes. European vessels, mostly

those flying French colors, plied the trade.<sup>5</sup> The Mauritian traders either traded on their own account or employed others to do the importing for them. In the latter case, the captain of the slave vessel would be entered in the records as the owner of the vessel, so that if the vessel was captured the real owner would not be compromised and his property would not be attached if he failed to pay the penalties that the court might impose. The third class of traders operated independently on a commission basis. The traders would collect funds from their clients, proceed to the slave marts, and return with their human proceeds. Their clients would collect the slaves and pay the agreed-upon commission to the "freelance" traders.<sup>6</sup> The organization of the trade in the Seychelles was similar to that in Mauritius.

The landing of slaves was relatively easy in the Seychelles and less easy in Mauritius. In the former place, imported slaves were easily smuggled into the islands, partly because of the scattered distribution of the islands and partly because of the small size of the imperial administrative establishment there. Until 1822, when twenty gendarmes were sent there, the only colonial "authority" on the islands that tried to interfere with the illegal traffic was the government agent. This officer had to contend, as Agent Edward Henry Madge put it, "alone and unsupported, even at the risk of his life, against the united interests of the people and the slave-traders."<sup>7</sup> Under these conditions it is hardly surprising that the slave population of the Seychelles, reckoned to be between 2,500 and 2,800 in 1809,<sup>8</sup> rose to almost 7,000 in the year 1815. In the latter year the numbers of male and female slaves reported to the slave registry office were 4,960 and 1,990 respectively.<sup>9</sup>

The feeble check on slave smuggling in the Seychelles also meant that very few slavers were captured and few slaves recovered. If the report that Madge made in August 1826 is correct, only three ships were seized in the Seychelles between Britain's capture of the islands in 1810 and May 1817: On June 27, 1812, one schooner, *Virginie*, owned by one Romarf and carrying thirty-seven slaves, was seized by Agent Lieutenant Sullivan after the



owner had landed the slaves at the island of Praslin. The vessel and the slaves were taken to the Cape of Good Hope for condemnation. In February 1816 a brig, *Marie Louise*, owned by Sausse and Dalbarade and commanded by the latter, landed about 130 slaves at Praslin. Madge seized the vessel and the forty-eight slaves that he could find. The vessel and the slaves were condemned at the Vice-Admiralty Court in Mauritius in November 1817. Dalbarade was fined £3,900 and jailed for not paying the fine. A few months after his discharge on the plea of insolvency, he escaped to Bourbon. The last seizure was the schooner *Lutter*, commanded by one Adolphe Maurel. The vessel had discharged an unknown number of slaves on the western coast of Mahé before Madge seized it and the four slaves that he recovered. The seizures were condemned at the Vice-Admiralty Court in Mauritius in January 1818, but Adolphe Maurel absconded.<sup>10</sup> Considering the difficult conditions prevailing in the Seychelles, Madge suggested that the surprising thing was not that so little was done, but rather that so much was accomplished!

In Mauritius there was a better record of surveillance by British men-of-war and by the local colonial authorities of the activities of the slave smugglers. Between October 1814 and February 1, 1817, the Vice-Admiralty Court in Mauritius condemned a total of 1,312 slaves released from slave vessels.<sup>11</sup> In order to avoid capture the slave traders had to display greater ingenuity and skill than their counterparts in the Seychelles. Many parts of the Mauritian coast afforded facilities for the landing of slaves, but the favorite parts were some points in the north and Black River and Savanne regions in the southwest and south, where topography and thick vegetation aided the task of stealthy landing and concealment of slaves. The high promontary of Morne Brabant, for example, enabled vessels carrying imported slaves to be concealed until nightfall, when the slaves were landed in the boats of fishermen or floated ashore upon rafts. Once the slaves were landed, their discovery and seizure by the colonial authorities were difficult on account of the cooperation of a wide network of vested interests, both white and black. The



deposition of one Laviolette, a slave, in the Vice-Admiralty Court in Mauritius on October 23, 1818, illustrates how the illicit traffic worked.

Laviolette, the slave of Hypolite Cuvillier, a slave trader and planter, was employed as a cook on a ship that sailed from Mauritius for Zanzibar and Mozambique on August 13, 1817. The vessel bought 180 slaves in Zanzibar and 70 slaves in Kilwa and then set sail for Mauritius in January 1818, arriving at Souillac on March 10. During the passage from Kilwa to Souillac, fifty slaves died of smallpox and were thrown overboard. The remaining 200 slaves were landed at Souillac, but the vessel was wrecked while trying to escape capture by a naval boat pursuing it. The landing of the slaves was aided by the four slaves sent to Souillac by their owner, one Charles Lelievre, a "Free Person of Colour" who resided in the district. For his assistance, Lelievre received from Philibert, the master of the slave vessel, forty sous on each of the slaves landed.<sup>12</sup> Another "Free black," one Colas, an estate manager, sheltered the crew of the vessel for five days before the crew were reunited with Hypolite Cuvillier and his comrade, Jean Quanto. Colas received sixteen dollars as compensation for his trouble.<sup>13</sup>

The task of recovering the illegally imported slaves was also rendered difficult by Governor Farquhar's insistence on legal due process. Before 1814, when the Treaty of Paris confirmed Britain's annexation of Mauritius and the Seychelles, the military posts established round the Mauritian coast helped in the detection, and sometimes in the seizure, of slaves after they had been landed. From the signal posts on the mountains, such as the one overlooking Port Louis, the movements of slave vessels were watched and information was conveyed to the soldiers for the apprehension of the slavers and their slaves. Military surveillance of the smugglers was aided by slaves themselves. Some of them came to the posts to give the military authorities information about slaves landed or concealed in the forests. As a result of the information collected, many seizures of slaves were made on the "high roads," or shortly before the slaves emerged from the forests into the main thor-

oughfares, while they were being conducted to the homes and plantations of their masters. Farquhar did not object to military assistance in the ultimate capture of the slave smugglers and the confiscation of their slaves, but he objected to the unilateral action of the military. On the advice of the *procureur-général* (the principal law officer of the government), who considered the measures taken by the military improper, Farquhar issued a general order in 1814 that required the troops to communicate their information on slave smuggling to the civil authorities and to act only under the instructions of the civil authorities.<sup>14</sup>

The slave traders exploited not only the cooperation of an extensive network of allies and Farquhar's insistence on "proper" legal procedures, but also the absence of the few British warships from Mauritian waters during the hurricane season, which lasted from December to April. During those months bold slavers slipped out of Port Louis for the slave marts and then returned to Mauritius with their human wares with the aid of the northerly winds before the warships could regain their position.

It is difficult to determine the number of slaves brought into Mauritius. In the year 1810 the official number of slaves on the island was about 61,000, but in 1817 the number was 79,493.<sup>15</sup> The difference in the two figures was not wholly due to illicit slave trading, for after the capitulation of the French residents in Madagascar to the British in 1810, the Frenchmen were permitted to bring their slaves to Mauritius. It would seem, however, that the illicit importations brought in thousands rather than hundreds of slaves annually. In May 1821 Governor Farquhar, in a communication to the imperial authorities in India, estimated that 30,000 slaves were imported into Mauritius between 1811 and 1821.<sup>16</sup> If the estimate was a fair one, it means that, on the average, 3,000 slaves were imported annually. If the annual average intake is compared to the number of slaves condemned at the Mauritius Vice-Admiralty Court during the period 1814-17, it would seem that the slave traders lost only nineteen percent of the slaves imported.

The success of the slave traders, and their ability to elude



capture or escape punishment,<sup>17</sup> aroused the anger of Lord Bathurst, Liverpool's successor at the Colonial Office. He wrote a dispatch on the subject to Farquhar on April 1, 1817. The dispatch was precipitated by the letter that the secretary of the British Admiralty addressed to Bathurst's under/secretary on March 29, announcing the capture of two more vessels engaged in the slave trade between Madagascar and Mauritius. One of the vessels carried 150 slaves; the other, 80. Lord Bathurst stated that it was not so much for the honor of the British government as for Farquhar's "own character" that the illegal slave traffic should be suppressed effectively. He acknowledged Farquhar's efforts on many occasions to check the illegal traffic, but he remarked that, while many persons had been detected in carrying on the slave traffic between Madagascar and Mauritius, he was not aware of "any instance" in which the parties concerned had been brought to trial for felony. He said that only effective punishment would deter a strong temptation to commit a crime. Therefore he urged Farquhar to bring the existing offenders and all those who might break the abolition law to trial at the Mauritius courts. If Farquhar thought that there were "circumstances in the constitution" of the courts that would disqualify the courts from handling the cases, he should send the culprits, together with the evidence relevant to their cases, to Britain for trial.<sup>18</sup>

Lord Bathurst's questioning of Farquhar's "character" stirred the governor up. What was wrong with his "character"? In a reply dated October 11, 1817, and written in forceful language, he made it clear that his boss had greatly underestimated the problems involved in suppressing the illegal slave trade. He said that in a colony like Mauritius, accustomed to slaving, situated close to islands favoring slavery and providing hiding places for smugglers, and given only limited means and power to check slave smuggling, not much could have been done to crush the trade.<sup>19</sup>

It is certainly not a credit to Farquhar's administration when one contemplates the fact that, up to September 1817, "in no one instance," as George Smith (Chief Judge and Commissary of Justice of Mauritius) admitted, "have we yet been able to bring

any person liable to a charge of felony, under the Slave Felony Act [of 1811], to justice . . . .”<sup>20</sup> It is also clear that Lord Bathurst greatly underestimated the fighting qualities of the Frenchmen and the gallicized “Free Blacks,” who refused to wait for Britain to clip their economic wings. The slaving interests collaborated not only in eluding the feeble naval surveillance of Mauritius, but also in aiding the apprehended slave smugglers to escape punishment. Many offending smugglers managed to escape before being delivered to the police authorities, or contrived to escape from prison after they had been “secured” there. Escape from jail was not difficult: one could bribe his way out of prison; more important, the guard provided by the police was so “strong” that it was said that one prisoner who had “bolted” from the prison paraded the streets daily and “for a length of time” without any disturbance from the police! Even if the prisoner did not escape, he could count, and he often did so, on the sympathetic jurors to bring in a verdict of not guilty.<sup>21</sup> For French smugglers caught in the act, prosecution was not possible under the Felony Act because they were not British subjects.<sup>22</sup>

The measures taken so far by the British government and by Farquhar’s administration having failed to stop illegal slave imports into Mauritius and the Seychelles, Farquhar decided that it was better to fight the slave trade at its source than at the importing end. An important source of supply was the African mainland, but he had no means of persuading African rulers to agree to a stoppage or curtailment of the trade. Madagascar was different, however. Farquhar had designs on the island. He wanted to bring it under British rule, or at least under British “influence.” The latter was more likely, because the most powerful ruler on the island, King Radama, was friendly but was very zealous of keeping his independence. King Radama had not yet subdued the inhabitants on the northwestern side of the island and might need help in the form of guns and military hardware. In return for the military assistance, he might be willing to close the Madagascar slave market to the Mauritian traders. Luckily for Farquhar, friendly commercial ties



already existed between Mauritius and Madagascar and provided an avenue of approach to the King. An envoy whom Farquhar sent to Radama was instructed to present Farquhar's motives in the best of light: Farquhar was "only" interested in promoting the welfare of Radama's people and would assist in the development of the country's natural resources. In return, he expected the King to help him to choke off slave supplies to Mauritius.

Farquhar's envoy did a very good job. After negotiations between the two sides, a treaty was concluded on October 23, 1817, between Farquhar's representatives and Radama's ministers. The Radama-Farquhar Treaty bound Radama to forbid the export of slaves from his country to foreign lands. The King agreed to reduce to slavery any person under his authority who sold or helped to sell slaves for export. Also, he agreed to forbid his people to attack the inhabitants of Johanna, the ruler of which was claimed to be Britain's ally. In return for the loss of the duties levied on the slaves exported from Radama's dominion, the treaty stipulated that he would receive money and military supplies to the value of £2,000. The subsidy was to be paid yearly. Radama did issue the required proclamations and expected the payment of the subsidy to be kept up, but his British friend went on leave at the end of 1817 and did not return to Mauritius until July 1820. While Farquhar was away, the acting governorship was filled by three members of the British military forces; Major-General G. J. Hall (November 1817-December 1818), Colonel Dalrymple (December 1818-February 1819), and Major-General R. Darling (February 1819-July 1820). These men, particularly Hall and Darling, were men of a different temperament from Farquhar; they did not see much use in subsidizing a King who, they believed, could not prevent the export of slaves to Mauritius. They were unwilling to find out how far Radama would keep his promises, for their method of dealing with the slave trade was to attack the trade at its importing end.

General Hall dealt with the slave smugglers in true military style—with force. Unlike his predecessor in office, he paid no attention to legality and the niceties of due process of law, for he

saw about him—he was in the country when Governor Farquhar ordered the imperial troops to follow the instructions of the civil authorities when dealing with slave smugglers—a vast network of law-breakers and conspiracies to defy punishment. He issued orders to the soldiers to visit the homes and plantations of slave owners suspected of concealing illicitly imported slaves and to seize any such slaves. He refused to pay Radama the subsidy due to the King, considering it a waste of money. He dismissed from office French civil servants who were suspected of helping the slave traders or conniving at their business. His unorthodox measures raised loud howls of protests from the Frenchmen. Since 1814 they had never seen anything like what he was doing. When the judges complained about the illegal visits to homes and seizures of slaves, General Hall suspended them from office. The Chief Justice himself was among those suspended. Hall's measures resulted in the seizure of a large number of slaves from the homes and properties of the planters, and deterred for a while weak-kneed slave traders. The deterrence was reinforced by his proclamation, issued on May 1, 1818, prohibiting the use of boats to fish at night. His forceful methods of cracking down on slave smuggling were generally applauded by Lord Bathurst, but even the colonial secretary himself felt obliged to caution Hall against his highhandedness, particularly his dismissal of civil servants and his extreme disrespect to the judges. Because of his methods, Bathurst reinstated the judges. Unfortunately, the "salutary lessons" that Hall taught the Mauritians did not last very long; no sooner did he depart from the country than the slave traders resumed their trading with full vigor. Dalrymple's term of office was too short to be effective.

General Darling began his acting governorship on a note of limited compromise. A severe hurricane had hit Mauritius on January 25, 1819, devouring in its path properties and crops. Food was in such short supply that Dalrymple had to regulate the sale of bread in order to conserve the supply and make it last longer. Such was the plight of the Mauritians when Darling assumed office. In



order to avert unnecessary suffering, he lifted the ban on night fishing imposed by Hall.<sup>23</sup> The resumption of night fishing proved a boon to the fishermen and also to the slave traders, who used the boats not to land fishes but slaves. The Seychelles were not hit by the hurricane, because the islands normally lie outside the track of hurricanes, but they took advantage of the shortage of slaves in Mauritius to "stock up" on them for reexport to Mauritius as "homegrown." The conversion of a relief measure into feverish acts of illegality forced Darling to reimpose the ban on night fishing with boats on July 16, 1819.<sup>24</sup> The honeymoon with the Mauritians was over. Darling worked assiduously to discover and confiscate newly imported slaves. Like Hall, he refused to pay the agreed-upon subsidy to King Radama; also he maintained the embargo on the export of arms and gunpowder to Madagascar and recommended the adoption of the measure to Governor Milius of Bourbon, who was collaborating with the government of Mauritius in an attempt to check the importation of slaves into their respective colonies.<sup>25</sup>

Darling accomplished little in spite of his efforts. He complained of difficulties in discovering newly imported slaves and asked the British government for smaller vessels to assist the only available British warship to watch the Mauritian coast. Instead of furnishing the requested aid, Bathurst sent him the following remark:

I cannot avoid expressing some surprise that you should not have looked to the Order in Council [of September 1814] for the registry of slaves, as giving the best means of procuring evidence of illegal importation, and as prescribing the most effectual obstacle to its continuance. You must be aware, that the main object of that law was to check the importation of new slaves, by at once releasing from slavery, every negro not previously registered; and it is not too much to assert, that if the registrar be properly active in the discharge of his duty, and the law enforced with that strictness and vigilance which the strong suspicion of a large illegal importation demands, the newly imported negroes cannot escape detection.<sup>27</sup>

The newly imported slaves escaped detection partly because of a

serious omission in the Order in Council of September 24, 1814, and the serious defects in the slave registers compiled in 1815 and 1816 under the provisions of the Order in Council. The latter did not provide for the verification of the returns submitted to the registrar of slaves; it only required the slave owner or his duly accredited agent to swear on oath that his return was true and accurate to the best of his knowledge.<sup>27</sup> The slaves were classified under four headings: "Mozambiques" (i.e., slaves imported from the African mainland), "Malagaches" or "Malageshes" (slaves from Madagascar), "Creoles" (slaves born in Mauritius and its dependencies), and "Indians" (slaves from India and Malaya). The descriptions of the slaves included their age, height and facial marks. Some returns, which Colebrooke and Blair described as bearing "the appearance of fraud on the face of them," described the slaves as "Mozambiques or Malagaches, averaging fifteen to twenty years of age, without parents or children . . . ."<sup>28</sup> Many returns were made by those who possessed no slaves at all, but who sold the certificates of registration to slave proprietors or slave importers. In the absence of verification, it was not difficult for slave proprietors to replenish their stock of slaves by purchasing new ones that matched the descriptions in their returns. Those who bought the fraudulent certificates could fill "their" depleted stock by purchasing from Africa or Madagascar slaves matching the generalized descriptions in the returns represented by the certificates.<sup>29</sup>

The problem of detecting illegally imported slaves was complicated by two additional factors: the effects of the hurricane of 1819 and the volume of internal trading in slaves. The hurricane as well as water that leaked from the roofs of the registry office made many records very difficult to read. Many slaves were transferred from their original owners to secondary and tertiary purchasers without the sales or transfers being registered in the slave registry. The defects in the 1815-16 returns and the various transfers that took place between that time and the triennial returns of 1819 made it difficult to detect newly imported slaves.<sup>30</sup>

When Farquhar resumed office in July 1820, he inherited a



complicated situation. The imperious army governors had gone, leaving behind an irritated but hardly cowed slave oligarchy. The law courts were still unreformed. The British government still expected the "abolitionist cordon" to be tightened around the colony without providing the means of doing so. Farquhar had suggested the appointment of a British representative in the Portuguese colony in East Africa, but a penny-saving British government had turned down his proposal. The only course open to him, it seemed, was the familiar treaty method of fighting the slave trade. Therefore he approached his old friend, King Radama, to renew the Treaty of 1817 with an additional inducement: this time Mauritius and Britain would educate some of Radama's people and provide him with technical assistance. Radama signed the new treaty. Three years later he was persuaded by Farquhar to grant yet another concession: British warships were authorized to seize slave ships found in Madagascar waters, and a method of adjudicating cases of capture was agreed upon.

Farquhar looked further afield. Sultan Said bin Sultan, the ruler of Oman (1804-56), and the inheritor of Omani territorial claims along the coast of East Africa, was desirous of expanding the trade between Mauritius and his East African "dominions." Farquhar was willing to grant the Sultan's wishes if the Sultan on his part would help Farquhar to stop the slave trade. He wrote letters to the British government in India, asking the imperial authorities there to use their influence to persuade Said to make concessions about the slave trade. Said explained that he could not order his subjects to stop dealing in slaves, but he said that he would be willing to forbid the sale of slaves to the Europeans. Farquhar took advantage of the concession to secure a formal treaty, forbidding the export of slaves from the Sultan's East African "dominions" to non-Muslim lands. The treaty was the Moresby Treaty of 1822. Farquhar returned to England in 1823 before the effects of his treaty methods on the suppression of the slave trade could be measured. He was succeeded in office by Lieutenant-General Sir G. Lowry Cole, governor from 1823 to 1818.

Governor Cole had no better luck than his predecessors in

fighting the slave trade. The naval patrols were still feeble. To make matters worse, Cole was instructed by the British government to ignore certain loopholes in the slave prevention regulations between Mauritius and Madagascar for the sake of maintaining cordial relations with Radama and preventing him from drifting into the French colonial orbit.<sup>31</sup> The only new development was that the accumulated defects in the slave registry records had become so glaring, or to use the words of Lord Bathurst, "so numerous and considerable,"<sup>32</sup> that the British government asked the King to issue the Order in Council of January 30, 1826, amending the Order in Council of September 24, 1814.

The Order in Council of January 1826 ordered a fresh census of all slaves in Mauritius and its dependencies within three months after the publication of the Order. The governor was empowered to appoint an assistant registrar for each district to assist the registrar of slaves in the discharge of his duties. The slaves were to be divided into two groups: "plantation slaves" and "personal slaves." The first category comprised slaves, whether domestic or agricultural, "belonging or attached" to the plantation of their owner. The second group consisted of slaves not "attached" to any particular plantation. The new Order in Council provided for the inspection of the whole slave population. On designated days the "personal slaves" were to be brought to the registrar or assistant registrar at some convenient place for inspection, while the "plantation slaves" were to be mustered on the estates to which they belonged for the same purpose. After verification of the returns made by the slave owners, the assistant registrars were to certify the returns before transmitting them to the central registry office at Port Louis for recording. Fraudulent or incomplete returns, or returns not made on the prescribed forms, were to be rejected; the lists of the defaulters and of all rejected returns were also to be forwarded to the central registry office. The new Order in Council provided that no sale or transfer of slaves would take effect until the transaction had been registered in the central registry office. Births, deaths and emancipation of slaves were to be made



known to, and registered by, the registrar, separate registers being kept for each of the categories. Instead of triennial returns, there would now be biennial returns after the fresh census. Lastly, the Order in Council of 1826 stipulated that the legal sanctions were to be the same as those prescribed by the previous Order in Council.<sup>33</sup>

The fresh registration of slaves started on October 16, 1826, and was completed in January 1827. After the collation of the returns, the number of slaves in Mauritius was stated to be 69,264; in the Seychelles, 6,520; and in the other dependencies of Mauritius, 782.<sup>34</sup> The ascertaining of the number of slaves made the suppression of the slave trade ostensibly easier. If the importers of slaves were not caught in the act of smuggling in slaves, those who purchased the slaves would find it "difficult" to explain how they came into the possession of extra slaves. But things did not work out so smoothly, for the economic changes that had taken place since 1810 were gradually transforming Mauritius into a country "ruled" by "King Sugar." Expanding agricultural output and an amplified commerce called for adequate manpower to sustain them. These changes contributed to the sharpening of efforts to circumvent the abolition laws. Let us have a closer look at the changes.

When Farquhar assumed the governorship of Mauritius in 1810, only about 10,000 acres of land were planted with sugar. In 1812 the output of sugar was under 1,000,000 French lbs. (1,080,000 English lbs.).<sup>35</sup> As a result of Farquhar's encouragement, the sugar output had increased to 6,583,400 lbs. in 1817. Then technical changes for extracting more sugar from the cane followed. In 1819 Charles Telfair, an Irish doctor and an "enlightened" slave owner, introduced the first horizontal roller mill in his estate at Bel Ombre in the Savanne district. The horizontal roller extracted more sugar than its predecessor, the *frangourinier* and the three-roller vertical mills. In 1822 Adrien d'Epinay, a planter and later a famous politician, introduced steam-driven rollers in his estate in the Flacq district. Other enterprising planters followed the example, installing six steam-driven mills by 1823. By 1828 the sugar mills were

no longer driven by cattle or by wind, but by steam or water.<sup>36</sup> From 1826 onwards, partly as a result of the work of Farquhar, who was now a member of the British Parliament, Mauritian sugar imported into Britain was charged the same rate of duties as the sugar imported from the British West Indies. The combined changes outlined here produced the following results in the sugar output.<sup>37</sup>

Table 1

Year	Output of Sugar Per 100 lbs. (French)	Year	Output of Sugar Per 100 lbs. (French)
1819	56,788	1829	584,315
1820	155,247	1830	679,266
1821	204,100	1831	702,036
1822	234,046	1832	735,948
1823	274,008	1833	674,835
1824	243,345	1834	711,438
1825	217,397	1835	648,545
1826	424,894		
1827	406,192		
1828	483,501		

More slaves were smuggled into Mauritius not only to meet the demands of "King Sugar," but also to provide for an expanding commerce. The extension of sugar cultivation led to decreased emphasis on the cultivation of foodstuffs and to greater dependence on foreign food imports. From India came grains as well as manufactured goods. The Cape of Good Hope supplied wheat, oats, barley, flour, beef and poultry besides horses and mules for transport purposes. Food was also imported from places as far away as Europe and America.<sup>38</sup> The food imports, paid for with the sugar grown with slave labor, increased the food supply, but they did not satisfy such needs as for beef and fish. Some planters who owned "surplus hands" employed them in fishing. Many slaves were employed in the Mauritian beef trade with Madagascar and in other branches of commerce. Between February 1819 and



November 30, 1827, a total of 5,961 slaves were employed in outgoing ships registered in Port Louis, while 5,131 slaves were employed in incoming ships. Between October 28, 1826, and November 30, 1827, the numbers of slaves employed in outgoing and incoming ships were 961 and 963 respectively.<sup>39</sup> In 1827 the proportion of slaves among the crew of British colonial vessels at Port Louis was 866 slaves to 864 freemen.<sup>40</sup> The discharging and loading of foreign and colonial vessels required a large number of dockworkers, most of whom were slaves.<sup>41</sup>

It was the strong demand for slaves for various purposes and the grave shortage of free workers that defied British attempts to stop the slave trade in Mauritius. The traffic continued to be so active that the British government decided to send the Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry, Colebrooke and Blair, to report on the problem. After studying the problem for about two years, Colebrooke and Blair issued their report on March 12, 1829. They recommended the ending of all "authorized" slave trade, such as the concessions that Britain granted to the Portuguese and the Omani Arabs. Until all seaborne slave trading ended, they warned, illegal slave trading would continue. To lessen the temptation to illegal slaving, they recommended the introduction of Chinese and other free workers into the colony.<sup>42</sup> Although the commissioners did not go so far as to recommend the abolition of slavery and the conversion of slaves into free workers, their recommendations underlined the futility of trying, with limited means, to stop the flow of slaves without at the same time providing alternative labor to sustain the slave-propped economy.

The demand for slaves continued long after the commissioners had issued their report. Until the 1840's, when immigrant Indian laborers replaced black workers on the plantations, it was the black slaves who furnished, through their labor, the indispensable means for the prosperity and well-being of the white colonists. How the black sinews fared in the period under review is discussed in the next section.

### **Conditions of Slavery**

The life of the slave in British-ruled Mauritius and the Seychelles was not much different from what it was when France ruled the islands. As in the past, some of the slaves were owned by the government; the government was now British and the Crown slaves were euphemistically called "Government Blacks." The rest of the slave population belonged to single persons, families and business partners. The majority of the slave owners were small proprietors: they owned from one slave to five slaves. The poorer whites and most of the "Free Persons of Colour" belonged to this class of owners. The middling proprietors owned between six and twenty slaves. Those who owned scores or hundreds of slaves were very few in number, but their influence was great; it was this oligarchical core that set the tones of "genteel" behavior or of defiant opposition to measures that might lessen the brutalities of slavery. Mauritius was still very rural; the Seychelles were even more rural. This meant that few of the slaves were town slaves, employed in sundry occupations for the benefit of their masters and for generating the means of their own livelihood. Under British rule the majority of the slaves were engaged in the production of market staples more than before. The slaves were housed close to their places or work. Their huts, built or repaired by them with the materials furnished by their masters or collected from the masters' estates, were arranged in rows. The occupants of each hut were permitted to grow tobacco, gourds and vegetables on the small patches of land adjoining their dwellings.

On the plantations the slaves performed a variety of tasks, depending on their abilities and skills. They tilled the ground, kept the gardens clear of weeds, reaped matured crops, mended tools and repaired farm buildings. Some of the slaves worked mostly in their masters' homes as domestics under the supervision of the members of the masters' household. The "field hands" worked either under the direct management of the masters or under the immediate supervision of hired managers. Where managers were

employed, they were either the relations of the master, poorer whites, or "Free Blacks." The managers were assisted in their duties by slave overseers or "drivers," who were usually sturdy or "well-behaved" slaves. The favored slaves, usually those most "intelligently" attuned to their servile condition, waited on their masters and accompanied the masters on their travels abroad, such as business or family visits to Bourbon. Such visits were frequent in the 1820s.<sup>43</sup> Some slaves formed the transport corps. In the Seychelles the absence of good roads and the scattered distribution of the islands made communication by boat a very important one. It was the slaves who manned the vessels or carried their master-passengers ashore.<sup>44</sup> In Mauritius planters and merchants sent their crops to or fetched their goods from Port Louis by coastal vessels manned partly by freemen and partly by slaves. They preferred water transportation on account of the bad state of the roads or tracks. Travels on land were on foot, on horses, or by means of palanquins, chairlike "carriages" borne on the shoulders of slaves. Palanquins were the ubiquitous means of travel until the 1820s, when as a result of the road-building programs of Governors Farquhar and Cole, animal-drawn carriages began to appear in large numbers on the main thoroughfares. The improvement in road transportation led to a reduction in the size of the "transportation departments" of the planters, and to the reassignment of some of the slave carriers to agricultural work.<sup>45</sup>

The slave's daily routine varied, depending on such factors as the needs and temperament of the slave masters, the type of work done by the slave, and the weather. There were some "improving" slave lords who tried to get the best service from their slaves by careful management. Charles Telfair was one of such "improving" planters. From 1816 to 1819, he shared the ownership of the Bel Ombre estate in the Savanne district with his business associates, Messrs. Waugh, Blancard, and Le Sage. A paid manager helped to manage the estate. According to the census return submitted to the slave registry office in 1819, there were 426 slaves on the estate, but according to the return submitted to the collector of



internal revenue, there were only 378 slaves. The difference between the two figures constituted the depreciated or "inoperative" slaves, as they were labeled, on whom the owners did not want to pay taxes. In 1820 Telfair became the sole owner of the estate.<sup>46</sup> Later he moved his slaves to the Flacq district. It was not clear whether it was his experience in the joint management of the Bel Ombre estate or his personal disposition that made him an "improving" slave lord. The important point, however, was that he fed, clothed and treated his slaves "better" than most slave proprietors. On the two estates that he owned in Flacq, the slaves worked comparatively shorter hours and had some leisure time! What was even more interesting was the fact that he made allowances for their religious and secular instruction. The children on the estates, who were said to be about eighty in number in 1829, received two hours of elementary instruction each day to enable them to read and write the Scriptures. On Sundays the adult slaves were assembled on the estate to participate in prayers. According to contemporary British pastors, Telfair was for many years the only individual, lay or clerical, who permitted his slaves to receive elementary instruction.<sup>47</sup>

There were other proprietors who did not measure up to Telfair in "liberality," but who worked their slaves fairly reasonably. For most slaves, however, the daily chores were long. The stroke of the bell at dawn announced the start of the working day. Intervals might be allowed for momentary rests or for meals, but the chores were continued until faded light no longer permitted further manual drudgery. After that a muster of the slaves was held before the slaves turned in for the night. Herdsmen and domestics worked uncertain hours. The former could be awakened at night to round up stray farm animals; the latter sometimes worked until very late at night. The seasons also imposed their own rhythms. Times of sowing and reaping were usually ones of feverish activity, while the intervening periods were less so.

In spite of the variations in the employment and management of slaves, the lot of the slave, qua slave, was as harsh under British

rule as under French rule. The slaves as a class were still subject to the disabilities described in chapter 2. As late as 1822, for example, police regulations required slaves to retail articles only with permission. A police notice issued on April 4 of that year reminded the slave owners that their slaves were to be furnished with "notes" detailing articles that the slaves might sell; a slave caught selling articles without such authorization would be arrested and the articles would be confiscated. All persons purchasing articles not listed in the "notes" would be "liable to have the said articles seized and resold without restitution of the money, besides being condemned to the fine fixed by law."<sup>48</sup> Besides the denial of basic human rights, the slaves suffered severe punishments and were subjected to unnecessarily harsh restrictions; for example, as late as the latter part of the 1820s, some slave proprietors chained the feet of their slaves employed in small boats and coasting vessels. In May 1829 the official designated as the Protector of Slaves called the attention of the chief secretary to the Mauritius government to the practice, which was said to be extensive. A few weeks later the Protector recommended that Governor Charles Colville (1828-33) take such steps as he considered necessary to end a practice that, in case of accidents, endangered the lives of those chained.<sup>49</sup> The slaves were the objects of official correspondence but the beneficiaries of very little concrete reform.

The first attempts at reform were made by Governor Farquhar. The subject of the treatment of slaves was featured in the same dispatch that he wrote to Lord Liverpool on the need for continued importations of slaves. Farquhar stated that, although his observations had convinced him that the slave proprietors "are not, by any means, cruel masters," he had deemed it necessary to issue an order regulating the weight of chains that the slaves might bear. The order was designed, he explained, to accomplish two purposes: to keep the slaves in "proper subjection to, and respect for, their masters," while at the same time alleviating the "unnecessary [burdens] imposed upon our suffering fellow creatures." He assured his superior at the Colonial Office that he would do what he



could to "ameliorate" the conditions of "these unfortunate beings." He stressed, however, the need for caution: "It must not be disguised . . . that any sudden alteration, or an ill-timed display of sympathy, might be attended with the worst effects, at a moment like the present, by strengthening the impression which appears to have existed in a considerable degree in these colonies, that the arrival of the English was to be the signal of emancipation, and the release of the slave from all obligation towards his master."<sup>50</sup> The proposed chain order was issued in March 1811. It decreed that the weight of chains used in cases of "simple police"—that is, in the chaining of slaves to prevent them from escaping—should be reduced by half. The "halved" chains were to be applied to male slaves and not to slave women and children. Slave masters who put heavier chains on the slaves or applied any chains to female slaves and slave children were to be punished by the confiscation of the slaves for the benefit of the state. In 1817 Farquhar issued orders prohibiting the flogging of women in public and the working of female maroons in chains in public.<sup>51</sup>

Two other aspects of slavery engaged Farquhar's attention. One dealt with runaway slaves; the other, with the manumission of slaves. In the past it had been the custom to pay to the owner the full value of a maroon killed while fleeing from officers trying to capture him, or actually resisting recapture. Farquhar considered the custom a barbarous one and proscribed it by an order that he issued on January 25, 1813. Instead of paying compensation to the owners of maroons killed by officers, the government increased the rewards paid to the officers who took the slaves alive.<sup>52</sup>

The other measure was prompted by an apparent increase in the number of manumitted slaves seeking relief from public funds. An order issued on December 30, 1814, laid down stringent rules for the regulation of subsequent manumissions. A slave owner wishing to manumit his slave was required to address a petition to the governor, stating his reasons for wishing to manumit his slave. If the governor approved the reasons, the slave proprietor was then required to comply with a number of formalities. First, he had to



donate one hundred dollars to the poor fund and made provision for the maintenance of the intended beneficiary according to the following schedule: a male slave under fifteen years of age would be guaranteed \$150; a male slave between fifteen and forty-five years, \$120; and a male slave over forty-five, \$200. A female slave under twelve years of age was to be assured \$200. For female slaves between twelve and twenty-five years, the guaranteed sum was \$300; for those over twenty-five, the sum was \$200. Second, the master had to advertise the proposed manumission in three successive weekly issues of the gazette. The advertisement had to state the name of the slave master and the name, sex, age and ethnic background of the intended beneficiary. The purpose of the advertisement was to enable all those who had interests in the slave to register their claims or their objections with the attorney-general. Those who thought that the proposed manumission would not benefit the colony were also expected to communicate their reasons to the attorney-general. If no objections were raised against the intended manumission, the slave owner proceeded to the third step, the drawing up of the deed of manumission by a public notary. The deed of manumission had to specify that the slave proprietor was willing to free the slave and that the monetary arrangements described above had been made. The fourth step involved a check by the attorney-general that the foregoing formalities had been duly carried out. If the attorney-general was satisfied and raised no objection, he was to issue a certificate of nonopposition and made a report of the whole proceedings to the minister of justice. If the latter confirmed the deed of manumission, the deed was then sent to the governor for final approval.<sup>53</sup> If the governor approved the deed, the slave became a free man!

What does one say of Farquhar's orders dealing with the conditions of the slaves in the colony under his charge? A review of the measures would show some creditable points, but the measures as a whole appear to be more the product of expediency than a manifestation of a genuine concern for the plight of the slaves. Let us start with the "emancipation" regulations which came into

force on January 1, 1815. One would applaud the governor's attempt to check the practice by some slave owners of getting rid of "inoperative" slaves under the guise of manumission. The monetary payments that the slave owners were required to make to the manumitted slaves might even be regarded as a form of redistribution of wealth as well as an insurance against the indigency of the freed slaves. It would seem, however, that Farquhar's chief consideration in issuing the regulations was to prevent the affranchised slaves from becoming a burden on the state. Compared to the previous practices, the process of emancipation required by Farquhar was unnecessarily stiff; one might even say that it was designed to hinder manumission. In 1815 only twenty-eight slaves were manumitted; a year later, the number was fifty-two. There was no remarkable increase until 1818, when 107 slaves were affranchised. The peak was recorded in 1821 with the affranchisement of 172 slaves. In 1823, the year that Farquhar left office, the number was only fifty-two. Altogether, 1,005 slaves were manumitted between 1815 and 1826.<sup>54</sup> Because of the stiff procedure imposed by Farquhar, marriage of slaves to "Free Blacks" was found to be the easiest avenue to freedom. For example, of the 444 slaves listed as being freed between January 1, 1821, and June 1, 1826, 245 gained their freedom via the marriage route, while 199 were freed by purchase of freedom and by the "benevolence" of the slave masters, including the colonial government. The slaves freed by the latter constituted a very small proportion of the slaves freed by purchase and by "benevolence."<sup>55</sup>

The expedient character of the "emancipation" proclamation is illustrated by several other points. Section 12 of the proclamation recognized, as the French administration had before, that marriage between a "Free Man of Colour" and his female slave entitled the latter to freedom, and exempted the husbands of such unions from paying the sums prescribed by the proclamation; however, the female slaves were not recognized as free until after their husbands had satisfied the governor that they had the means to support their wives. If the husbands lacked the recognized means, the procla-



mation required them to fulfil all the formalities described above.<sup>56</sup> Section 14 stipulated that freed persons without visible means of support were "to submit to any government order for employing them on the highways, or such public works as may be prescribed [for] them." Such persons would be fed and compensated for their labor at the rates commensurate with their "deserts," but no payment was to exceed two dollars a month per worker.<sup>57</sup> A similar provision did not apply to the poor whites who were on public relief.

With respect to the "chain" and "maroon" proclamations, one would readily concede the fact that the bearing of "halved" chains was less onerous than the bearing of the full weight of chains, and that compensating persons for capturing runaway slaves alive was better than paying them for killing slaves. On the other hand, it would seem that these measures were equally designed to conserve the relatively scarce slave resources. Farquhar did very little to enforce the chain regulations, nor did his administration do something about the brutality of the maroonage law. The administration of the latter did not benefit the slaves; the chief beneficiaries were in fact the state and a section of the white proprietary class. These points need further discussion.

The colonial government presided over by Farquhar and his immediate successors continued the French regulations, which charged the government with the capture of runaway slaves and empowered the government to use a part of the capitation tax levied on slave owners to defray the necessary expenses incurred in administering the fugitive slave law. In 1817 the rate of the tax was seventy-five cents per slave in the rural districts and one dollar and fifty cents in Port Louis.<sup>58</sup> Those charged with the recovery of fugitive slaves were called "Chiefs of Detachments"; they were usually chosen from the ranks of small proprietors in the rural districts who employed the few slaves they owned in this service. Some Chiefs of Detachments used, besides their slaves, the government slaves apprenticed to them to scout out the fugitive slaves.<sup>59</sup>



The recovery of fugitive slaves was a grim business. Between December 1810 and January 23, 1813, eleven slave maroons, one described as a "Malagache" and ten as "Mozambiques," were killed. The Chiefs of Detachments collected their rewards on production of the hands of the dead fugitives. Between November 24, 1814, and March 17, 1828, eighteen maroons were wounded. The number of maroons recorded as killed between January 23 and June 17, 1828, was sixteen: nine "Mozambiques," three "Malagaches," three creoles and one of unknown origin.<sup>60</sup> The number of these victims may seem small, but the "smallness" of their number—more slaves were perhaps killed than were recorded—does not change the fact that the victims were killed in most instances without violent resistance on their part. A maroon's refusal to be captured was, however, considered enough provocation for shooting and killing him. After capture the fugitive slaves recovered in Mauritius were sent over to Port Louis, where they were detained and worked in gangs on public works before they were turned over to their owners. The public works included the cleaning of the "Great Sewer" of Port Louis. In Farquhar's time the job was done on Sundays. In the Seychelles the recovered fugitives were handled locally.<sup>61</sup> The ears of the recovered fugitives were no longer cut off, but the punishments the slaves received were still harsh. In November 1826 the Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry observed that "the undefined privilege allowed the masters of chaining their slaves is still exercised by them, and has led to the practice of some brutalities which no fair construction of the law can be admitted to sanction . . ."<sup>62</sup>

The manner of employing the maroons and other slaves in street cleaning elicited the following remarks from Sir George Murray, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in May 1829:

It has been stated, upon authority entitled to great respect, that in the streets of Port Louis, the slaves who are employed as scavengers, are yoked together to carts, and exhibit a very offensive and humiliating spectacle. If any such practice really prevails, immediate measures must be taken for the suppression of it. In the improvement of the

general condition of the slaves, nothing can be more essential than to cultivate the sense of self respect among the slaves, and to abolish all practices destructive of it.<sup>63</sup>

Governor Colville acknowledged the fact that the spectacle of men employed in such dirty work, "more than half naked and in chains (partial nudity being however preferable, in such a climate, to a continuance in clothes so filthied)," was an ugly one; he did not, however, think that the men were yoked to their carts any more than "the Royal Artillery are in the dragging of heavy ordnance or stores, or barge-towers, firemen, or others employed in moving weights by manual labour . . ." <sup>64</sup> Colville's remarks would indicate that Murray's picture was somewhat overdrawn. The fact remains, however, that the maroons and other offending blacks employed in street cleaning were chained together by the neck in twos, and that some of the chains (including the collars) weighed as much as nine pounds. The chief police commissioner testified to this fact and added the following note: "It will be impossible to apply these prisoners to any work, except where there is an inclosure . . . as they would make their escape; indeed they now frequently do so, as it is." <sup>65</sup>

The administration of the fugitive slave law provided windfall profits to the colonial government. It augmented government revenue and cheapened the cost of providing some services. According to the assessment of Colebrooks and Blair, the "annual average amount raised from the maroonage tax" was £3,388 6s. 2d., of which £3,102 12s. 10d. was assessed on slaves and £285 13s. 4d. on carts, wagons and related items. The commissioners stated that the annual average yield of the tax was almost sufficient to meet the cost of the police establishment, which in the year 1828 amounted to £4,948 6s. <sup>66</sup> Besides this windfall, the colonial government collected, according to "immemorial usage," fees from the masters whose slave maroons were detained in the police prison for a period longer than fifteen days. <sup>67</sup>

The best illustration of the importance of punitive maroon labor in the cheapening of the cost of certain governmental programs is



perhaps provided by Governor Colville himself. Explaining some of the reasons for the delay in issuing an ordinance to ban the use of chains as a means of punishment, he said:

An idea of the expense at which Government work can alone be done by hired blacks will be learnt from the following fact: On the Royal Engineer's advertisement for contracts for cleaning out the wet ditch of Fort Blanc, under the recent sanction of His Majesty's Board of Treasury and Ordinance, the tenders given in varied from 800£. to 1,600£. sterling; a circumstance so disgusting, that being disposable at the time, I allotted to the purpose the blacks condemned under sentences of the tribunals, and who, to the [number] of from twenty-one to twenty-four daily, from the first of August last [1829] will, in a month or two, have completed the job, at the cost to Government of but a small dram and a few ounces of salt meat to each per diem.<sup>68</sup>

Most of the condemned blacks serving sentences were maroons. It might be objected that there was nothing wrong in running penal institutions at a profit. The important point to note, however, was that the cost of certain programs was calculated on the presumption that a certain number of chained blacks would be available for unpaid work.<sup>69</sup>

The administration of the fugitive slave law also benefited some of the slave owners. The sizable sums paid to the proprietors of the slaves killed as maroons or executed for crimes prior to Governor Farquhar's ban of the practice drew this comment from the British colonial auditors in December 1816: "The sum of \$1520 appears to have been paid to the owners of slaves killed as maroons or executed for crimes, at the rate of \$80 per head. The certificate in support of the charge implies that the payment is made in all cases of this nature." The colonial auditors deplored the possibility that some of the slave proprietors might have used the compensation system to dispose, profitably, of their unwanted slaves by inciting the slaves to become maroons or to commit "heinous crimes."<sup>70</sup> Even if the slave owners were not so venal as to get rid of their bad slaves in the way that the auditors had "insinuated," the compensations that the masters received gave them the means to buy newer



and "better" slaves. As late as 1833 slave owners received monetary payments for slaves condemned as "grand maroons" or "incorrigibles." In that year the estimated expenditure on this head was £1,324 12s. 8d. Of this sum, £666 6s. 4d. was disbursed during the first six months of 1833. It was hoped that this charge to the public expenditure would cease under the fugitive slave law passed in 1833.<sup>71</sup> Finally, the Chiefs of Detachments had opportunities for earning extra remuneration for the hunting down of slave maroons. Colebrooke and Blair observed that "as the reward" to the Chiefs of Detachments "is increased in proportion to the time that the slave has been declared a maroon, an inducement is held out to delay the apprehensions of them [sic] when discovered." They added that the government's use of the slaves after their capture had the effect of "withdrawing them for too long a period from the service of their masters."<sup>72</sup> It was the exploitative nature of the maroonage system that made Colebrooke and Blair notify Governor Colville, in July 1828, that they would recommend the entire, though gradual, abolition of the system.<sup>73</sup>

From the foregoing, it is clear that the slaves did not benefit from two of the major components of Farquhar's reforms either during or after his long governorship. The enforcement of the chain regulations by Generals Hall and Darling did not produce very fruitful results. We shall review their work, however, both because of the energy that they displayed in discharging their duties as they conceived them and because of the slaves' attempt to cash in on the acting governors' "anti-slavery" zeal.

On September 1, 1818, one Elie, a creole slave, owned by L. Blancard, part-owner of the Bel Ombre estate, guided Captain Ogden, the officer commanding the military post of Jacote (near Bel Ombre) to a neighboring estate, owned by one Eulair, where illegally imported slaves were supposedly landed. Ogden's investigation partially confirmed Elie's information, although the slaves were not found. Blancard put Elie in heavy chains for the information he gave to Ogden. News of the reprisal reached the

colonial authorities and a police officer was sent to investigate the case. In the report that the police officer made on September 10, 1818, it was stated that Elie was "confined and in chains, viz: the right foot with an iron shoe supported by an iron trivet, and the left with a like shoe fastened by a chain fixed in a log of wood; the said negro was employed in grinding Indian corn, with the help of another negro, who turned a plain Indian corn mill; he declared to us, that he had been so chained for eight days."<sup>74</sup> As a punishment for his brutality, Blancard was relieved of his post as the civil and police commissary of the district of Savanne. His dismissal was confirmed by Lord Bathurst.<sup>75</sup>

Another instance of severe punishment of slaves for acting as informers occurred during Darling's acting governorship. The slave involved was one Tryptard, belonging to one Madame Terreux, owner of an estate in Flacq. Major G. H. Montague, the officer who went with the civil commissary of the district to investigate the case, reported in September 1819 as follows:

I went to the house of Madame Terreux, and inspected a slave of her's named Tryptard; I found him in a room with his legs placed in a kind of stocks, so that he could only lay [sic] on his face, supporting himself with his knees and arms; a large iron ring was fastened round his neck, and to that a long thick chain. I did not see any marks of punishment [corporal punishment] on him, but he had a very emaciated appearance. I understand he has been in that state for three or four months.<sup>76</sup>

The chaining of slave informers by their irate masters occurred so frequently that Darling ordered inspections of the estates on which slave informers lived to make sure that the slaves were not severely punished for their loose tongue. In cases of extreme torture they were removed from the plantations and their owners were prosecuted. Some of the prosecutions ended in the court's ordering the sale of the slaves concerned and the owners' being given the proceeds of the sale.<sup>77</sup> Darling soon discovered, however, that many slaves were in the habit of bringing forward false charges of illegal importation of slaves against their masters on



account of the wrongs that the latter allegedly did to them. One example may be cited for its boldness. A slave belonging to the owner of an estate in Poudre d'Or took two of his master's slaves to the police as a case of fresh importation. When the police referred to the slave registry office, it was found that the two slaves were "regularly reported and entered" in the records. Such falsifications were too much for the anti-slave trade governor to bear. He decided that from that time on if a slave gave a well-founded information about illegal slave importations, the slave would be purchased "on account of government"; but if the information was proved to be totally unfounded, the slave would be turned over to his master for "appropriate" punishment, with "an intimation to the master, that any undue severity would subject him to prosecution, and that government would not fail to make him strictly answerable."<sup>78</sup> The government rarely made the slave owners strictly answerable for exploiting and ill-treating their slaves, for the government itself was not known for being particularly concerned about the welfare of the slaves that it owned.

The slaves owned by the government consisted of slaves inherited from the French colonial administration and slaves "freed" from slave ships that the British men-of-war seized in the Indian Ocean. Because the slaves were formally "condemned" at the Vice-Admiralty Courts, they were also known as "Prize Negroes." On December 3, 1811, some 2,316 slaves were condemned at the Vice-Admiralty Court at the Cape of Good Hope for the benefit of the colonial government.<sup>79</sup> Recaptives were added from time to time. Minor additions were also made by occasional purchases. Although the number of such purchases was small, the circumstances under which they were made are interesting. A few examples will be given here. Sometime in 1816 the civil engineer of Mauritius, O'Brien, purchased four slaves at a public sale for the use of his department. The purchases were made in accordance with instructions from the governor "as per Mr. O'Brien's letter" of March 1, 1816. In December 1815 one slave, named Noel, was



accidentally wounded while doing the *corvée*. The government paid the value of the slave to the owner and then enrolled the slave as a "Government Black." During the last year of Farquhar's governorship, two slaves who had given information to the government at the time of Hall and Darling, and who were chastised by their masters for doing so, were purchased from their masters. One slave, named Basta, owned by one Esperon, was sentenced to "perpetual chains"; on April 21, 1823, Governor Farquhar granted him a pardon. An indemnity having been paid to Esperon at the time that Basta was sentenced to life in chains, the government enrolled Basta as a "Government Black." Finally, a slave who had attempted to kill himself was nursed back to health by the government. Unable to pay the hospital expenses incurred by the government, the owner, a woman, gave up the slave and he was taken as a "Government Black" on Cole's order in March 1825.<sup>80</sup>

Initially, the government bore the whole cost of maintaining its slaves. It provided housing, food, clothing and medical assistance. After the great fire of 1816, which destroyed many buildings and shops in Port Louis, the *bagne* was converted into residential quarters for the slaves. In 1812 the total expenditure on them amounted to \$65,578.97, broken down as follows: provisions, \$43,885.57; clothing, \$5,725; medical assistance, \$11,600.40; and salaries to the superintendent of slaves and his staff, \$4,368.<sup>81</sup> In 1813 the total expenditure was \$62,327.945, broken down as follows: provisions, \$12,463.695; clothing, \$20,090.69; medical assistance, \$18,020.93; contingencies, \$6,349.13; and "superintendence," \$5,403.50.<sup>82</sup> After the adoption of the system of "apprenticeship," the government was relieved of some of the costs.

Government slaves were distributed in three ways. A greater proportion of them were assigned to employers as "apprentices." A few hundred served at different times in the imperial military forces stationed in Mauritius, and on board British cruisers. The remainder were employed in government departments as "apprentices."<sup>83</sup> All government slaves had to serve an indenture.

which generally lasted fourteen years. Before an employer assumed charge over the slaves assigned to him, he was required to enter into contractual obligations, a process also known as "articling," with the collector of customs, who acted on behalf of the government. The employer bound himself to furnish the "apprentice" or "apprentices" with sufficient food, clothing and medical assistance, and to instruct them in a trade or "other useful employment . . . ." The "apprentices" were to be instructed in the Christian religion "as speedily as possible." When sufficiently instructed, they were to be baptized. Also, they were to be allowed to attend public worship on Sundays and holy days. The employers engaged not to treat them harshly or severely, and not to sell them or permit them to be sold. If an "apprentice" was sold, his master was required to pay twice his value to the government. If the employer failed to discharge his responsibilities toward his "apprentices," the latter would be removed from him before the expiration of the indenture.<sup>84</sup> There was no formal "articling" in the case of government slaves retained by the government for its own use; the understanding was that the government would meet its responsibilities.

The terms governing the "apprenticeship" were slightly modified in 1819 and 1824. In the former year the masters of the "apprentices" were required to "maintain and provide for any child or children that may be born during the term of apprenticeship until the expiration of such term"; the masters were also obligated to report to the collector of customs the births of such children within a month of their delivery, specifying the mothers' names, trade and dates of indenture, as well as the names given to or chosen for the children.<sup>85</sup> In the latter year the persons to whom slave boys and slave girls were assigned had to teach the former to read and the latter to do needlework. The children as a whole were to be given religious instruction. Once in every six months the slaves were to be produced before the superintendent of the matricule department for examination, in order that he might report to

the governor on the progress they had made in their respective trades or occupations.<sup>86</sup> It is very enlightening to note the trades or occupations for which the slaves were "apprenticed" for fourteen years: they were described as those of "house servant," "sempstress," "tinman and glazier," "boat carpenter," "gardener," "joiner," "horseboy," and "carpenter and joiner."<sup>87</sup> An "apprentice" who spent fourteen years in learning how to be a "horseboy" could handle any horse in the world!

The government failed the slaves that it owned in at least three important ways: in the provision of adequate housing, in the proper checking of the conditions under which those "articled" lived and worked, and in the insurance of adequate remuneration for their services. Conditions at the *bagne* were described in 1828 as follows: "...there is neither proper nor sufficient accommodation for Blacks of any description and more particularly for females and children."<sup>88</sup> There is no indication that living conditions at the *bagne* were better during the period 1816-28.

With respect to the government slaves assigned to private employers, it does not seem that checks were made before 1820 to see that their masters lived up to their contractual obligations. The supervision of the slaves was entrusted to the collector of customs, but this official had little time at his disposal to conduct tours of inspection. It was not until the year 1820 that Hart Davis, Collector of Customs, instituted an annual mustering of slaves to determine how the slaves were treated in the previous year. After inspecting the slaves in the annual muster held in 1826, W. Blane reported that, from the condition and appearance of the "apprentices" and from the questions he asked them, he had every reason to feel satisfied that their masters and mistresses had fulfilled strictly their engagements to treat the slaves with humanity and kindness.<sup>89</sup>

P. Salters, Blane's successor, held musters of slaves between November 1827 and January 31, 1828. On the latter date he reported his findings as follows:

I have derived much satisfaction from the healthy and contented



appearance of the apprentices and their children, and it is a gratification to me to add that of the 1904 individuals seen by me there was only one who showed symptoms of sickness—he said that it was of recent occurrence, but I thought my duty to send him to the Government Hospital to ensure his being well taken care of—the expense of course being borne by his master to whom he has since returned quite recovered. The man when I interrogated him expressed himself satisfied with his master, and with his treatment, and his illness from his description of it, seemed to be only one of those diseases common to the change of season.<sup>90</sup>

Salters also inspected the clothes of the slaves and discovered that a few of them had scanty clothing. He made a “careful” inquiry of these few cases and then concluded that the fault rested generally with the slaves and not with their masters.<sup>91</sup>

The portraits of healthy and contented “apprentices,” drawn by the collectors of customs after annual musters of slaves, were not supported by the findings of Colebrooke and Blair. In their report they made the following observation about the recaptives distributed among private employers of labor as “apprentices”:

The distribution of the negroes amongst the slaves in the colonies, their submission for a term of years to the same coercive labour and harsh treatment, and their exposure without remuneration in some instances, to severe drudgery from the superior interest of their master in the preservation of his slaves, has rendered the condition of that class but too often a reproach to the colonial authorities, and has given rise to an argument that their condition as slaves would have been preferable had they not been captured.<sup>92</sup>

Besides ill-using the “apprentices” by overworking them and treating them harshly, some planters employed the slaves improperly. The Chiefs of Detachments used not only their own slaves, but also the “Government Blacks” assigned to them to track down, and help in the recapture of, the slave maroons.

Both the government and private employers regarded “Government Blacks” as pools of cheap labor. These blacks provided cheap services at the residences of the top colonial officials, judges and the military, and in private homes. They provided services at

almost stationary wage rates, as the following table illustrates:

**Table 2**  
**Monthly Wage Rates Per Employed "Government Black"**

Year	Category	\$
1815	Men and Boys	3.00
	Women and Girls	2.00
	Coopers	9.00
1816-1817	Commanders	4.00
	Women and Girls	2.00
	Coopers	9.00
1821-1827	Hired by Ordnance and Royal Engineers:	
	Men	4.00
	Women	3.00
	Hired by Private Individuals:	
	Men	7.00
	Women	6.00
	Boys	6.00
	Girls	5.00

Source: P.P. XXV, 207 (1828), pp. 3-19.

It is true that the government gave "gratuities" to the "apprentices" it employed in order to excite a spirit of "emulation and industry" among them,<sup>93</sup> but it was also a fact that they were punished in the presence of their peers in order to make "an impression on the rest."<sup>94</sup>

After serving their apprenticeship, government slaves were either "re-apprenticed" or became "time-expired" slaves. In 1827 there were eleven "time-expired" government slaves. Of these, eight were "re-apprenticed" for one year to private employers who engaged to pay to the government six shillings (\$1.50) per apprentice for every month of engagement. The low wage rate drew a sarcastic remark from one official in the British Colonial Office: "They could earn this in two days."<sup>95</sup> The official probably exaggerated the amount that the slaves could earn, but the fact remains that they were not adequately remunerated for their work. During the late 1820s and early 1920s, the "time-expired" slaves

employed by the government were paid much higher wages than they received before; the annual wages ranged from less than £5 to slightly over £7, including rations. The new wage rates were, however, much lower than those paid to emancipated "Government Blacks." The wages of the latter ranged from £14 8s. to £19 4s. The highest-paid black was an emancipated "Government Black" employed as an assistant guard in the governor's office. The wages of the highest-paid blacks were at the bottom of the salary and wage structure of the colony.<sup>96</sup>

Not only were "Government Blacks" poorly paid, but it does not seem that they were in control of the whole amount of their remuneration. In 1828 Salters explained that the sums collected for their services were intended to provide a fund for their benefit and for their future maintenance.<sup>97</sup> The collector of customs distributed three-fourths of the amount to the slaves and deposited one-fourth of it in the colonial treasury. At the beginning of 1833 the "apprentice fund" amounted to £976. Between 1833 and November 11, 1839, Collector of Customs George C. Cunningham deposited £2,724 in the fund, making the total for the twelve-year period £3,700. On November 11 he petitioned the British Treasury to be allowed to draw a compensation out of the fund, for acting as the guardian of 1,363 "Prize Negroes" and 385 children of apprentices, many of whom were orphans. The petition received the endorsement of Governor William Nicolay (1833-40).<sup>98</sup> Fortunately, the British Treasury refused to sanction the request. The important point to note here is that the colonial government was prepared to pay the collector of customs extra compensation out of the "apprentice fund" without consulting the "owners" of the fund.

The exploitation of "Government Blacks" may be illustrated by an additional example. As a result of the "heavy" expenditure incurred by the Mauritius government in maintaining government slaves in general and those dumped at the *bagne* after being worn out in the services of their employers, the British government decided to remove some of them to the eastern frontiers of the Cape



colony in South Africa, where they would alleviate the demand for labor. In a letter dated June 12, 1828, Sir George Murray instructed Governor Colville that all "Government Blacks" selected for removal were to be emancipated, but that they were not to be declared free until they had actually embarked for the Cape. Only those who were healthy and capable of doing manual work were to be selected. All slave children were to be removed to the Cape, but the British government was not unwilling, Sir George said, "to permit, in all proper cases, parents to accompany their children, or children to remain with parents; provided, of course, that such indulgence should be judiciously administered."<sup>99</sup> In another letter of the same date, Sir George informed Sir G. Lowry Cole, then governor of the Cape colony, that the Cape government would bear the cost of the removal of the slaves to the Cape frontier. All adult slaves were to be "apprenticed" for a given period, say, ten years; the slave children under fourteen years of age were to be "apprenticed" for "that additional period." Cole was told to fix the price to be paid for the services of the "apprentices" during the first year high enough to recover the cost of "introducing" them. Finally, Sir George would not recommend that "any revenue properly speaking" should be derived from the labor of the Africans, yet their services should not be distributed gratuitously, for the Cape government should "in some measure be indemnified for the eventual expense of administering relief to those whom age and infirmity might render incapable of labour."<sup>100</sup>

It is not the "right" of the imperial government to relocate its slaves that is in question, but the fact that that government was prepared to separate families to achieve its end. Under the French Black Code children under fourteen years of age and their parents were not to be sold separately. Now an imperial government that had formally embraced the policy of "ameliorating" the conditions of slavery was instructing one of its governors not to "over-indulge" in the old injunction of keeping slave families together. Moreover, the adult slaves selected were to be freed only on the condition that they accepted ten years of enforced residence and additional "apprenticeship" in another land.

### **“Free Persons of Colour”**

By virtue of their free status, the “Free Blacks” had access to opportunities beyond the reach of their shackled brethren. They engaged in various economic activities either as hired workers or on their own account. One of the important occupations in which they engaged was slave smuggling—a cogent proof that economic interests often blur color lines. Some of them were substantial slave dealers, owning vessels of thirty tons. One such vessel was the *St. Jacques*, seized by H. M. S. *Tyne* in September 1816 and condemned, on circumstantial evidence, at the Mauritius Vice-Admiralty Court for engaging in the slave trade. The owner and captain was one “coloured” man, Letord, described as “a notorious slave dealer.” He absconded before he could be put on trial.<sup>101</sup> Many “Free Blacks” derived considerable profits from helping to land and conceal illicitly imported slaves. They featured prominently in the provisions trade between Madagascar and Mauritius and in the interisland trade in general.<sup>102</sup> Some of them engaged in fishing and skilled trades. Many had farms or market gardens. Some were hired as managers of estates. Some of them were employed as masters of coasting vessels.<sup>102</sup>

As a result of their varied occupations, the “Free Blacks” of Mauritius as a group became considerable owners of landed properties. The size of their holdings in 1825 and the extent of their cultivation are indicated in Table 3.

They owned 5 of the 157 sugar mills worked by steam, water, or animals. Their share of the indigo factories and lime kilns were 2 out of 106 and 8 out of 48 respectively.<sup>105</sup> In 1825 there were, according to the Colonial Archivist D’Unienville, 8,178 whites, 4,133 “Free Blacks” and 61,187 slaves in the colony. Measured against the agricultural properties owned by the whites, the properties owned by the blacks did not amount to much, for whereas, on a per capita basis, one white man owned thirty acres, one “Free Black” owned less than eight.

**Plantations (in Arpents)<sup>104</sup>****Table 3**

	<b>Whites</b>	<b>Free Blacks</b>	<b>Total</b>
Forest	96,224.50	10,294.75	106,519.25
Savanna	86,958.25	10,426.75	97,385.00
Grain Crops	12,948.75	4,069.25	17,018.00
Manioc	12,531.00	2,681.50	15,212.50
Sugar Cane	23,946.00	1,021.25	24,967.25
Indigo	105.00	24.25	129.25
Coffee	942.25	118.50	1,060.75
Cotton	791.00	141.00	932.00
Cloves	872.50	77.00	949.50
Other crops	9,751.50	2,251.25	12,002.75
<b>Total</b>	<b>245,070.75</b>	<b>31,105.75</b>	<b>276,176.50</b>

The “Free Blacks” compare slightly better in the ownership of livestock, as the next table shows:

**Table 4<sup>106</sup>**

<b>Livestock</b>	<b>Whites</b>	<b>Free Blacks</b>	<b>Total</b>
Horses	510	65	575
Mules	726	62	788
Asses	852	387	1,239
Horned Cattle	16,906	2,788	19,694
Sheep and Goats	1,500	493	1,993
Pigs	3,055	1,456	4,511

It may be instructive to compare the livestock owned by the slaves with the figures given above. D’Unienville estimated that the slaves owned 20,000 pigs in 1825. Given an estimated slave population of 61,187, it means that on the average a pig was owned by three slaves. The inequities in the distribution of wealth in Mauritius could not be more glaring. Figures for the Seychelles are not available, but comparable inequalities existed. Lastly, some of the “Free Blacks” could boast of owning carriages. In 1825 the whites owned 604 carriages with two wheels, while the “Free Blacks” had 43. Their shares of other types of carriages were very modest.<sup>107</sup>

Although the “Free Blacks” had made considerable economic



progress by the 1820s, there still existed large pockets of poverty among them. Most of those who lived in the Black Town suburb of Port Louis were ungainfully employed as petty shopkeepers. In their numerous shops, as one of them (Delaville) described their conditions, "no other thing than a few parcels of firewood and some fruits and vegetables are to be found," the whole stock worth scarcely five dollars.<sup>108</sup> Possessing little stock and handling a limited turnover of goods, "a great part of the population," he continued, spent their lives "in a state of poverty," whereas if they were differently occupied they could get all the necessities that they needed. He ended his review of their economic plight as follows: "When the greatest part of the inhabitants of a place, town, city or island or state get the means to procure to themselves the largest part of the usual comfort, that place, town, city or state may be said to be in a flourishing state and vice versa."<sup>109</sup>

The nonflourishing state that Delaville bemoaned was not limited to Black Town. Elsewhere, as one L. F. Marcenay observed, the poor "Free Persons of Colour" who possessed "nothing" located themselves along the major crossroads and by the seashore. Some of them, he said, lived among trees, which served them as shelters. Those without skill eked a miserable existence, living on the proceeds of the chase, fishing, bartering and hand-outs. He recommended the allocation of Crown reserves and some other unused lands to the indigent, especially those who were married or constituted a household, and who were willing to cultivate the land.<sup>100</sup> It might seem an exaggeration to say that trees actually served those indigent blacks as homes, but there is no doubt that the poverty that Marcenay described was real.

The poverty experienced by the blacks affected some whites also. As a result of the spread of sugar cultivation and the declining cultivation of foodstuffs, many poor Mauritians were unable, as John Newman (Superintendent of the Botanical Garden) observed, to buy vegetables and other necessities of life, the prices of which had become very exorbitant. Newman suggested a number of remedies: increasing the number of gardeners by apprenticing

young "Government Blacks" in horticulture; after serving their apprenticeship, the blacks would be able "to obtain their livelihood in a creditable manner, either cultivating vegetables for themselves, or hired out as gardeners, as Government might deem most proper."<sup>111</sup>

It was probably the above testimony as well as their own appraisal of the cost of managing "Prize Negroes" that made the Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry recommend the following measures to the Mauritius government: reduction of the matricule department and enfranchising of "Government Blacks"; settlement of the latter and their families on provision grounds or government lands at the Reduit and Mon Plaisir (official country residences of the governor and the chief judge); and continued employment "for a time of some artificers and others" in the civil engineer's department as "apprentices."<sup>112</sup> The recommendations did not fall on good soil and so failed to take root. In the meantime some of the poor whites and poor "coloureds" were sustained by the doles given to them from the poor fund.<sup>113</sup>

In the Seychelles a fall in the price of cotton and the competition of American cotton resulted in a decline in cotton exports in the 1820s and 1830s. The planters adjusted to the recession by exporting thousands of slaves to Mauritius where sugar was king. Between August 1, 1818, and May 27, 1826, the number of slaves permanently transferred from the Seychelles was 1,954.<sup>114</sup> Between 1827 and 1839 a greater number of slaves as well as free families transferred their residence to Mauritius. According to one author, "the census returns for 1840 show a decline of 4,140 inhabitants as compared with the year 1830—nearly half of the population."<sup>115</sup> It is unlikely that migration to Mauritius was responsible for the whole decline in the population within the decade. In any case, reduced exports and reduced manpower affected the production of export staples as well as foodstuffs. Both developments and other factors ushered in a long period of agricultural distress that affected whites and blacks alike, although in varying degrees. The standard of living declined and poverty increased.

The socioeconomic changes and conditions discussed above sharpened, rather than weakened, the existing cleavages within Mauritian and Seychellois society. The whites, in spite of the existence of sizable pockets of poverty among them, still constituted the landed gentry. The plantocracy, used to lording it over others, expected the "inferior" classes to defer to them socially and to support their style of living with their cheap labor. The "fair-skinned" "Free Blacks," disdainful of their darker-skinned brethren and resentful of the privileges and recognition denied them by the whites, aspired to be elevated to a higher social plane. The slaves, the butt of the free classes, the thinking and breathing chattels without rights, bore the brunt of the accumulated prejudices of the privileged. All these groups looked up to the imperial power, still slave-owning and slave-using, to maintain their privileges or to right their wrongs. How Britain attempted to tackle these problems is the subject of the chapters that follow.

### Notes

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3. Robert Barclay, Collector of Internal Revenue, to M. G. Colebrooke and W. Blair, Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry, C.O. 415/6.
4. Colebrooke and Blair to Hay, May 2, 1828, C.O. 167/118.
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7. Great Britain, *Slaves in Mauritius*, P.P. XXV, 205 (1828), p. 82.
8. P.P. XXV, 292 (1829), p. 10; Auguste Toussaint, *Histoire des Iles Mascareignes* (Paris, 1972), p. 337.
9. P.P. XXV, 292 (1829), p. 23.
10. P.P. XXV, 205 (1818), p. 82.
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14. P.P. XXV, 292 (1829), pp. 12-13.
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16. C. S. Nicholls, *The Swahili Coast: Politics, Diplomacy and Trade on the East African Littoral, 1798-1856* (New York, 1971), p. 199.
17. P.P. XXV, 205, (1818), p. 79.
18. P.P. XXVII, 295 (1826), pp. 118-19.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-23.
20. George Smith to Farquhar, September 6, 1817, P.P. XXVII, 295 (1826), p. 131.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-36.
23. P.P. XXVII, 352 (1826), pp. 73-74.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-93.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.
26. P.P. XXVII, 352, (1826), pp. 122-23.
27. Great Britain, *Correspondence relative to the Slaves, including Copy of the Order in Council for the Registration of of Slaves in Mauritius*, P.P. XXVI, 339 (1826), pp. 16-17.
28. P.P. XXV, 292 (1829), p. 15.
29. *Ibid.*; Darling to Henry Goulborn, December 17, 1819, in P.P. XXVII, 352 (1826), 121-22.
30. P.P. XXV, 292 (1829), p. 19.
31. Gerald S. Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean: A Study of Maritime Enterprise, 1810-1850* (Oxford, 1967), p. 68.
32. Lord Bathurst to Governor Cole, February 26, 1826, P.P. XXVI, 339 (1826), pp. 3-6.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-16; Great Britain, *Return of Slaves on the Bel Ombre Estate and Order in Council for the Registration of Slaves in Mauritius*, P.P. XXII, 285. (1826-27), pp. 54-63.
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42. P.P. XXV, 292 (1829), pp. 40-45.
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49. P.P. XV, 262 (1830-31), p. 7.
50. P.P. XXVII, 295 (1826), pp. 6-7.
51. P.P. XXV, 337 (1829), pp. 3-4.
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53. Great Britain, *Papers Presented to Parliament by His Majesty's Command, in Explanation of the Measures Adopted by His Majesty's Government, for the Melioration of the Condition of the Slave Population of His Majesty's Possessions in the West Indies, on the Continent of South America, and at the Mauritius*, P.P. XXVII (1828), pp. 277-79.
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64. Ibid., P.P. XLVI, 733 (1831-32), p. 338.
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74. P.P. XXVII, 352 (1826), pp. 58-65.
75. Ibid., pp. 113-14.
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88. Minute on the "Return of Prize Negroes Whose Period of Apprenticeship is Expired, Showing also the Names of Their Present Masters," November 21, 1827, C.O. 415/11.
89. W. Blane to Lord Bathurst, February 27, 1826, C.O. 415/11.
90. P. Salters to William Huskisson, Colonial Secretary, January 31, 1828, enclosed in Salters to Colebrooke and Blair, February 7, 1828, C.O. 415/11.
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93. Report of the Finance Committee of the Council of Government, May 5, 1834, C.O. 170/7.
94. Blane to the Joint Commissaries of Police, October 13, 1819, C.O. 415/11.
95. Return of Prize Negroes Whose Period of Apprenticeship Had Expired, November 21, 1827, C.O. 415/11.
96. Schedule of the Establishment of the Civil Departments of Government for the Year 1833, C.O. 170/6.



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102. See the answers of one Mr. A. Coppale to the questionnaire submitted to him by Colebrooke and Blair, dated October 1827, C.O. 415/4.
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112. Colebrooke and Blair to Hay, November 4, 1828, C.O. 415/19.
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# **The Period of “Amelioration,” 1823-35**

### **The “Humanization” of Slavery**

Britain embraced the policy of “amelioration” in 1823. In that year, the “Christian politicians” and other abolitionists came together to form a society dedicated to securing the abolition of slavery in the British colonies. As a result of their pressures outside and inside the British Parliament, the House of Commons adopted the following resolutions on May 15, 1823: (1) Effective measures should be adopted for “ameliorating” the conditions of slavery in the British Crown colonies. (2) The measures adopted should be enforced vigorously but temperately, and in such a manner as to lead to a progressive improvement in the “character” of the slaves, “such as may prepare them for a participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of His Majesty’s subjects.” (3) The “amelioration” of the conditions of slavery and the preparation of the slaves for the ultimate enjoyment of freedom should be accomplished at the earliest possible period, consistent with “the welfare of the slaves themselves, the well-being of the colonies, and a fair and equitable consideration of the state of property therein.”<sup>1</sup>

In his dispatch of May 28, 1823, Lord Bathurst informed Governor Cole of the resolutions and urged him to implement certain specific measures without delay. First, there should be an absolute prohibition of the punishment of female slaves by flogging, a measure which “cannot fail . . . to restore to the female slaves that sense of shame which is at once the ornament and protection of their sex, and which their present mode of punishment has tended

so unfortunately to weaken, if not to obliterate." Second, the practice of "driving the slaves to work by the sound of the whip" should cease; also, the slave "driver" should no longer be permitted to apply the cane arbitrarily "as a stimulus to labour . . . ." Third, the administering of corporal punishment to male slaves might be retained, but it should be subject to defined regulations and restrictions. Other measures that required urgent legislative measures were: religious instruction of slaves "as the foundation of every beneficial change in the character and future condition" of the slaves; removal of unnecessary obstacles to the manumission of slaves; slaves not to be sold apart from their spouses or apart from their children under fourteen years of age; and insuring to the slaves the enjoyment of whatever property they might be able to acquire.<sup>2</sup>

The resolutions and Bathurst's instructions to the colonial governors in relation thereto have been interpreted as one more example of the onward march of British philanthropy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. British humanitarianism, the wellsprings of which reach back to the latter decades of the seventeenth century, had scored signal triumphs in 1772, when Lord Mansfield ruled that slavery could not exist on English soil, and in 1807, when the British Parliament proscribed the importation of slaves into the British Empire. The resolutions of May 15, 1823, and the "ameliorative" measures had not ended slavery, but they were, it is suggested, more than an intimation to the slaves that the end of slavery was at hand. In terms of chronology, this claim has some plausible points. It took the abolitionists decades to reach the "humanitarian" signpost of 1807; it took them a decade and a half to get Britain to adopt the policy of "amelioration"; and it took only a decade to secure the passage of the Emancipation Act of 1833, "freeing" slaves in the British colonies. Viewed from another light, however, the policy of "amelioration" was based on a very limited conception of slavery and the needs of the slave. As was suggested in chapter 1, there can be no such thing as "enlightened" slavery any more than there is an "improved" hell; one



can improve the conditions of freedom but not of slavery. Not only did the resolutions of May 15, 1823, and the "ameliorative" measures that Bathurst proposed attempt to deal with slavery around the edges, but also they betrayed the propertied classes' doubt about the fitness of the African to enjoy freedom. Throughout the period of "amelioration" emphasis was placed on "improving" slavery, but there was no attempt to improve the "character" of the slave owners and make them fit to enjoy those rights and privileges referred to in the resolutions. The failure to recognize slavery for the evil that it was because of the supposed rights of property in human beings set at nought British attempts to remedy the evil. In Mauritius and the Seychelles the governors and the planters did not fail to perceive the inconsistencies in imperial logic and to act according to their impulses and interests.

Perhaps sensing that it was futile to attempt to "improve" slavery, Cole took his time to implement the measures that Bathurst had outlined. On December 15, 1826, he issued the following circular letter to the commandants and civil commissaries of districts regarding the punishment of female slaves:

Up to this moment there has not existed any difference in the corrections ordered by the masters in respect to them, and those in use with regard to the men. Rest assured, gentlemen, that His Majesty's Government will suppress the punishment of flogging for Negro women. It must, in fact, be admitted, that the weakness of their sex and public decency would seem to require, that Negro women should undergo the lash only in extraordinary cases, and with the concurrence of the local authority. Do not irons, the stocks, imprisonment offer sufficient means of punishing a Negro woman, whose condition, besides being almost precarious, requires great care? Avail yourselves, Gentleman, of your influence with your fellow-countrymen, to prevail upon them to give up, of their own accord, the use of flogging in respect to female slaves. This voluntary determination on their part will be properly appreciated by His Majesty's ministers, and I shall experience a sincere satisfaction in having to announce to them, that the inhabitants of Mauritius did not stand in need of being compelled, by any coercive measures, to adopt a course which sound morality calls for. I leave to your prudence and discretion the task of communicating these instructions to the inhabitants of your district. I hope they will discover in

them a fresh proof of my solicitude for whatever may be conducive to their happiness and tranquility.<sup>3</sup>

Cole's circular letter on corporal punishment of slaves was not only empty, but also cynical. More than three years after Bathurst had instructed him to prohibit by legislative action the whipping of female slaves, he was telling the district officials that slave women were too delicate to be lashed by their masters, but strong enough to be flogged in "extraordinary cases" with the permission of the colonial authorities. The slave owners did not find it difficult to see that there was "little" need to flog the female slaves when they could be put in irons and stocks or confined in jail. The slave owners' "disbelief" in the corporal punishment of female slaves was further strengthened by Cole's assessment of the conduct and behavior of female slaves. In a dispatch dated December 14, 1826, forwarding Ordinance No. 20 of that year, regulating the weight of chains and fetters that could be put on slaves, he rationalized the flogging of female slaves in the following manner: "From the great numerical disproportion which exists between the male and the female slaves of this colony, a very general promiscuous intercourse prevails, which naturally debases the latter; and in many instances their conduct in every respect is fully as bad as that of the male slaves; therefore, although I admit that the abolishing of corporal punishment, in the cases of female slaves, is highly desirable, yet I conceive that bad consequences might result from its immediate prohibition."<sup>4</sup>

Cole's cynicism about regulating the punishment of "bad" slaves and his solicitude for the happiness and serenity of mind of the plantocrats were also mirrored by this chain ordinance. Issued on December 13, 1826, Ordinance No. 20 of 1826 (Chain Ordinance) regulated the weight of chains and fetters that could be put on various categories of slaves, and laid down penalties for the infringement of the ordinance. A slave master was permitted to apply chains and collars to offending male slaves over fifteen years of age as follows: The slaves could be chained singly or in pairs. If



they were chained singly, the chain and the collar should not exceed six pounds, and the slave should carry the chain around his body. If they were chained in pairs, the chains and the collars should not exceed nine pounds. The weight of chains borne by slaves, whether male or female, under fifteen years of age should not exceed five pounds when applied to them in pairs, and three pounds when applied to them singly; in no case, however, should male and female slaves be chained together.<sup>5</sup> The latter provision was apparently a reflection of Cole's concern for slaves' morality! The chain ordinance permitted the "augmentation" of the weights with official sanction. A slave owner who felt that his slave deserved to "wear" heavier chains and collars had to apply to the chief commissary of the police in Port Louis or to a civil district commissary. If either official decided that the slave deserved the heavier chains, he would spell out how the increased punishment should be applied. The regulations governing the application of fetters or iron rings to the feet of offending slaves were more "liberal." Slave boys and slave girls under fifteen years of age were exempted from carrying fetters. A slave who was fifteen years or above was to bear fetters or iron rings not exceeding three pounds. The ordinance banned the application of both chains and fetters to the same person at the same time without the authorization of the officials specified above. To cap the "liberal concessions" to the slaves, the ordinance decreed that they should not "wear" collars with three branches but only those with two branches!<sup>6</sup> The ordinance prescribed punishment for those who broke the law. A slave owner, manager, or overseer who disobeyed the law by inflicting unauthorized punishment on his slaves was liable, on conviction for the first offense, to pay a fine not less than two pounds sterling and not more than ten pounds. The fine for a second offense was a minimum of ten and a maximum of twenty pounds.<sup>7</sup>

Cole's promotion of the interests of the planters was not limited to confirming their "rights" to chain and fetter their slaves, or to put the slaves in the stocks; he also gave the slave masters the



impression that "ameliorative" measures could be modified in their favor, and that they did not have to comply with regulations that ran counter to their interests. It was a subtle defiance of authority that the grateful planters did not fail to notice. In his circular letter of August 3, 1826, he called upon the commandants and civil commissaries of districts to use their "prudence and discretion" to get slave owners to comply with the Edict of December 1723 and the Ordinance of September 1867, prohibiting Sunday labor and regulating the feeding, clothing, and punishment of slaves. Cole "vowed" that, if the slave owners did not voluntarily obey the law, he would be compelled, much against his will, to resort to "measures of rigour, which will be repugnant to my feelings, no doubt, but will be called for by the dictates of humanity, by the laws and by the colonial interests." He even expressed hope that the slave would be worked during the weekdays only from half an hour before sunrise to a quarter of an hour after sunset.<sup>8</sup>

Cole's "resolution" to enforce the law and his recommendation of limited working hours for the slaves seemed to augur well for the future. Unfortunately, however, his "resolution" contained much hot air and little substance. When he talked about the dictates of humanity, he was not talking about the humanity of the slaves but about planters' humanity. Despite the clear instructions of Lord Bathurst that the slaves should not work on Sundays, and that Sundays should be reserved for the contemplation of the eternal and the enrichment of souls, Cole told the planters that the Sabbath need not be observed under "exceptional circumstances." The latter included the season of cutting, gathering, and preparation of sugar cane, when planters might find it necessary to work their slaves at night. He said that he would not oppose such work on Sundays, provided that the slaves were given the following day off to rest themselves. Similarly, he would not oppose the retention of slaves as guards of corn and rice crops until harvest time, provided that the slaves were compensated for the Sundays that they worked.<sup>9</sup>

Taken as a whole, the measures that Cole adopted in 1826 left the slaves practically where they were before. Many slave masters continued to apply the stick to instil "proper" behavior in the female slaves. Some proprietors had less recourse to the stick, for they had other corrective remedies. Since the chain ordinance banned the placing of fetters and iron rings only on female slaves below the age of fifteen, they had no qualms about clamping fetters on the feet of female slaves who were fifteen or above. Their favorite instrument was the "Bar of Justice." This was a kind of iron stocks, consisting of an iron bar from eight to ten feet in length to which were attached iron rings; the rings were then fastened to the feet of the slave a little above the ankle by means of bolts. "In this machine," the Protector of Slaves reported in June 1829, female slaves "may be confined for a length of time, night or day, in a sitting or recumbent posture, as it admits of their doing needlework and other employment of that nature; and this sort of punishment is continued at the mistress's pleasure, as the service of the slave is not lost whilst the punishment is going on."<sup>10</sup> The "driving" of the male slaves to work continued on many plantations. Despite Cole's regulations, many proprietors had no qualms about applying three-pronged collars to the necks of their slaves. If they could apply two-pronged collars, the slaves could withstand an additional prong!

The use of chains, collars and leg fetters continued, albeit in "diminished" weights, without censure from the imperial government until 1829. In May of that year Sir George Murray informed Colville, Cole's successor as governor, that the use of chains as an ordinary instrument of domestic punishment in a country with a tropical climate should be deprecated on "every principle of humanity and sound policy." Sir George expressed deep regret at Cole's failure to prohibit altogether the use of chains and collars, the specimens of which (transmitted to the Colonial Office by Commissioners Colebrooke and Blair) were nothing less than "instruments of torture." Colville was informed that the King could not confirm the chain ordinance, and was instructed to



propose, without delay, to the governor's council the enactment of another ordinance founded on better principles. The new ordinance should prohibit altogether the use of chains, collars, fetters, or similar instruments for punishing slaves, except when necessary to prevent the escape of those awaiting trial on "heinous charges," or those sentenced by lower or appellate courts; but even in these cases, Sir George warned, the use of chains should be carefully regulated so as to prevent their being abused by the jailer.<sup>11</sup> Colville demurred for some time before carrying out the directives of the secretary of state for the colonies. More will be said later about the reactionary policies and attitudes of this governor toward the slaves.

The slaves also gained nothing from the official concern for their religious instruction. Bathurst had hoped that the rest from Sabbath labor would, if observed, afford the slaves the opportunity of receiving instructions in the Christian religion. Little of that happened. In the first place, there were no provisions for religious teachers to take charge of the catechizing of thousands of slaves. If even there were provisions, seasons or times of "exceptional" agricultural activity could always deprive the slaves of the opportunity of being instructed. The religious instructional program was so successful that in 1829, for example, only seventeen slaves were said to have been "sufficiently instructed in the religion they profess to know the nature and obligation of an oath." Twelve of the seventeen were employed at the governor's residence at the Reduit and ranged in age from seventeen to thirty-five.<sup>12</sup> The religion referred to was either Catholicism or Anglicanism. Thanks perhaps to the paucity of ministers in the early period of British rule in Mauritius and the Seychelles, the supposedly pagan slaves were spared instruction in the religion worn by their oppressors, instruction geared to making them appreciate the nature and obligations of oaths that already featured in the religious practices of their ancestral lands.

The legislative measure that the governor in council passed in 1827 dealt with Bathurst's call for the removal of unnecessary



obstacles to the manumission of slaves. The legislative measure was Ordinance No. 21 of January 27, 1827. As stated in the preamble, its purpose was to revise and consolidate in a single ordinance existing laws and regulations governing manumission; particularly, it was designed to modify Farquhar's proclamation of December 30, 1814, "the necessity and equity of which experience has demonstrated . . . ."<sup>13</sup> A careful comparison of the provisions of the ordinance with those in Farquhar's proclamation reveals, however, only two significant changes. One was related to the children of slaves freed by their masters. Article 4 of the ordinance stipulated that if a master freed his female slave, her children under seven years of age became free *de jure*; it obligated the master to make such provisions for the support of the children as were acceptable to the chief judge on the report of the procureur-general. The other change related to emancipation by marriage. Article 8 confirmed the provision in the Black Code (the Edict of December 1723), stipulating that the marriage of a slave woman to her free or emancipated black master entitled her to freedom, but also laid down that "on the marriage of a free woman of colour or emancipated negress with her slave, such slave shall be emancipated *de jure*."<sup>14</sup>

There was also some relaxation in the manner of assuring the colonial authorities that the slaves freed by their masters would be able to support themselves. Farquhar's proclamation laid down a specified schedule of monetary guarantees, but Cole's ordinance permitted the slave proprietor to make guarantees in the form of tillable lands, in slaves, or in other acceptable forms.<sup>15</sup> In terms of monetary value, however, Cole's concessions did not amount to much. During Farquhar's time, the slaves that some masters gave to their emancipated slaves for the support of those emancipated were valued at rates ranging from £40 (\$200) to £100 (\$500);<sup>16</sup> the highest sum that the master was required to guarantee for the support of his freed slave was \$300. Since the prices of slaves had risen during Colville's governorship, the burden of guaranteeing that a manumitted slave would not become a public liability was, in

fact, heavier under Colville's administration than under Farquhar's.

Except for the reduction of the "donation" to the poor fund from £20 to £5 in respect of each slave that a master wished to free, the process of emancipation as laid down in Cole's ordinance was as stiff as that laid down in Farquhar's proclamation. In terms of the number of slaves enfranchised, the governorship of Cole did not achieve significantly more than Farquhar's. The number of those manumitted was kept low by the tedious formalities observed and by the slow processing of petitions for leave to emancipate slaves. Colebrooke and Blair reported that 159 petitions had been received by Governor Cole between April 1825 and March 1828, but that the emancipations had not been completed "owing . . . to the forms and securities required by the Colonial Ordinance . . . ."<sup>17</sup> In both administrations, the chief concern of the government was not to foster emancipation as such, but to ensure that those who passed through the manumission mill did not become a burden to the state.

It was the same concern for limiting the number of poor free blacks and poor whites seeking state relief that lay behind another "ameliorative" measure passed on January 9, 1828. The latest measure was designed to provide an increase in the charges for maintaining abandoned infirm slaves and to discourage their abandonment by their masters "for the purpose of throwing them upon the government for maintenance and protection." A master convicted in court for abandoning his infirm slaves was required to pay a fine of not less than four pounds and not more than twenty pounds sterling. In addition, the convicted master had to pay one shilling a day for the support of each abandoned infirm slave admitted to the state hospital. To ensure the support payment, the law decreed that the hospital should have "a privileged lien" on the real estates of the master.<sup>18</sup>

Cole's governorship was noted not only for the lack of real interests in the mitigation of the evils of slavery, but also for a strong indication of planters' opposition to "amelioration." The

fighting stance of the planters was stimulated by the imperial government's transmission to Mauritius of the Trinidad Order in Council of March 10, 1824, as a model of measures that should be adopted in Mauritius and its dependencies for "improving" the conditions of slavery. The provisions of the Trinidad Order in Council were discussed by a committee of the principal slave proprietors of Mauritius, which met in the late spring of 1827 under the name of the Colonial Committee, with the declared aim of promoting the harmonization of the views of the British government with the interests of the colony. Governor Cole approved the formation of the Colonial Committee as an instrument for a two-way communication between the colonial government and the "inhabitants," that is, the planters. Although the Colonial Committee's observations on the Trinidad Order in Council did not result in overt acts of insubordination—Cole was such a "good" governor that there was no cause for such acts—they deserve to be discussed in some detail for two reasons. First, they were a pointer to the planters' determination to nullify "amelioration" during Colville's administration. Second, they give illustrations of their warped image of the Negro as a subhuman being. The Colonial Committee found fault with practically all sections of the Trinidad Order in Council, but their major concerns were the following:<sup>19</sup>

1. The appointment of a Protector of Slaves.
2. Abolition of the whip as an emblem of authority and as a stimulus to labor, and the punishment of slaves generally.
3. Slave marriages and the right of slave families to remain together.
4. The right of slaves to own property.
5. The easing of the manumission process and the issue of compulsory manumission.

I shall discuss these objections in sequence.

The Colonial Committee opposed the appointment of a Protector of Slaves on the ground that it was "superfluous" and "useless." It argued that under the colonial laws the slaves had an official protector in the person of the procureur-general. It referred to Article 19 of the Edict of December 1723, which stipulated that



slaves who were not fed, clothed, or cared for by their masters could complain to that official, and that the latter, on receiving independent confirmation of the charges of the slaves, was required to prosecute the masters at his own suit and free of cost to the slaves. It was also the responsibility of the official to prosecute cases of barbarous and inhuman treatment of slaves by their masters. Besides the official protector, the records of the courts attested, the Colonial Committee claimed, to the protection that the magistrates "at all times" extended to the slaves. When a slave was prosecuted for any offense, he was officially provided with a counsel to defend him free of charge. A person who was detained as a slave but claimed that he was a free man did not suffer because he was unable to retain a lawyer, for a lawyer was either appointed by the magistrate or was elected by the lawyers themselves to defend the detainee. If the slaves had been so "zealously" protected in the past, the Colonial Committee wanted to know the reason for appointing a new Protector of Slaves, "who already have a powerful and zealous one in the Procureur-General, who find one in each magistrate, in each member of the law who is bound to give them gratuitous assistance, in each free man who is bound to accept at his own cost the guardianship confided to him by the judge."

Besides being "superfluous," the appointment of a Protector of Slaves would be, it was argued, "fraught with great danger." The slave proprietors would not consider him as the defender of the rights of the slave, for the same function had "always" been performed in the manner described above, but as "his blind protector, his friend, and consequently the opponent of slavery, of our institutions, of our colony." Even if the Protector was not the Slave's "friend" and his "blind defender," the fact that he was a stranger, forbidden to "attach himself by any tie" to the colony, a stranger unacquainted with the laws and customs of the colony and the habits of its peoples, would make him liable to make mistakes at the beginning. The mistakes would be due to his inexperience, but the proprietors would attribute them to malevolence or to "the

prejudices existing in Europe against the colonies." Experience had also shown that the arrival of special officials, such as commissioners, had excited slaves to have "extravagant hopes." If the arrival of the Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry, a fact-finding body, was sufficient "to raise chimerical hopes" among the slaves, "to cause insubordination in many workshops, desertions, complaints mostly discovered to be unfounded," what would happen on the arrival of a Protector of Slaves, "a man whose mission will be quite of an exclusive nature, who will be considered by some as an enemy, by others as a devoted friend?" The Colonial Committee concluded that, if it was just a protector that the British Government wanted, such a person already existed in Mauritius, and that to appoint another protector would be "the height of impolicy . . . ."

How valid were the arguments advanced by the Colonial Committee against the appointment of a new Protector of Slaves? The committee's appeal to the adequacy and fullness of the "protection" given to the slaves by the colonial laws, administered by slave-owning officials or by officials with intimate connections with the slave-owning classes, fooled nobody but themselves and their sympathizers. It is not difficult to show that there can be no full protection of the interests of the enslaved by his enslaver. The planters failed to recognize, or rather would not admit, that point because of their vested interests in the continuation of slavery. The imperial power, for its own special reasons, also failed to concede the fact that what the slave needed was the restoration and protection of the freedom denied him by enslavement. The anticipated appointment of a Protector of Slaves and the indicated opposition to it were all aspects of a game of buying time, of postponing the day of reckoning. The game, played without consultation with the slaves, conferred no benefit on anyone except those who kept their fellow men in bondage and those who, in many ways, upheld the illegitimate rights of the former. The toying with "reforms" did not make slavery "more bearable"; if it did anything, it heightened the anxiety of the slave.



The next important concern of the planters was about the punishment of slaves. The Colonial Committee argued that the slave "commanders" or "drivers" carried the whip as an "emblem of authority" and not, as people imagined in Europe, as a means of stimulating slaves to work. It claimed that the custom of "exhibiting" the whip in the fields could not be abolished suddenly on account of blacks' propensity to engage in violent fights:

Those who know the blacks must be aware how difficult it is for the masters to prevent their striking each other, which they do with the utmost brutality. It generally happens that there are blacks sent to hospitals owing to ill-usage received from their comrades. Nothing is more common than to see some of them dying from the consequences of the blows so inflicted upon them.

It was for the sake of preventing blacks from inflicting damaging blows on their fellow blacks that the masters selected the "commanders" from among those whose physical strength was likely to command respect. The whip was needed not for striking the slaves but to sustain respect for the "commanders," without which "many quarrels would spring up amongst them."

The above appeal to the "savage nature" of the slaves as a reason for the "exhibition" of the whip in the fields failed to explain how the "mere exhibition" of the whip would quiet "brute" workers who were capable of dishing out supposedly finishing blows to their fellow blacks. Like the Israelites of the Bible, who were saved as long as they looked at the brazen serpent, all that the blacks needed to tame their "savageness" was to look at the "driver's" whip!

The Colonial Committee opposed the ban on the "exhibition" of the whip for another reason. "Many inhabitants," it claimed, "have nearly abolished the use of the whip" on their plantations. Their example would be followed by others and the time would come "when, by the mere force of circumstances, an amelioration would have been obtained which an express law would only have the effect of retarding." The committee said that the governor himself could bear witness to the fact that more could be achieved



by voluntary acts than by compulsion. "In fact, without any new law," it added, "the condition of the blacks has undergone greater improvement in a few years than it could have obtained by measures purely of a binding nature." Again, the Colonial Committee failed to show in what way the conditions of the slaves had improved in the early 1820s or even before, not did it indicate the means by which those planters who had given up the use of the whip tamed the "savagery" of the slaves.

The planters expressed opposition to the proposed ban on the flogging of women. They claimed that, although "it was a rare occurrence at present for a woman to be flogged," the proscription of flogging would destroy the "sense of fear" needed to restrain the slave women, some of whom were more undisciplined than men. The deterrent effect of the stick was needed to restrain the special power that the women had over the men: "They generally have a great ascendancy over them, in a country where there are many more men than women. If they no longer feared any bodily correction, they will excite them to disobedience, and assist them in the robberies they so often commit." The planters suggested that the disuse of the whip in correcting female slaves should be done with the "utmost circumspection," and that it might be best "to wait until an exact proportion shall exist between the sexes; which will have the effect of making the women lose a part of that powerful influence they now exercise over the men." What the planters were alluding to here was the supposedly sexual power that the female slaves had over the male slaves who greatly outnumbered the former. They seem to be suggesting that the "rationing" of sex by the female slaves would cease to be a "goad" for criminal behavior on the part of the male slaves when an equalization of the sex ratios was achieved. One more the planters appealed to very crude prejudices for the sake of holding onto the lash. As has been shown in chapter 1, a constant demographic feature of slavery in Mauritius was the great imbalance in the sex ratios. Supposing that the "sexual power" of the slave women was a major cause of the unruliness of the male slaves, and that the

whip was needed to keep the power in leash, then the ending of the flogging of the female slaves would depend on a demographic miracle, given the numerical preponderance of males over females.

The Colonial Committee's reservations about slave marriages and the keeping of slave spouses together with their young children reflected not only their economic interests, but also their caricature image of the African slaves. The planters conceded that the slaves, like other persons, should exercise the right to marry, and that the slaves should not be compelled by their masters to marry against their will. They argued, however, that under the existing circumstances slaves should not be allowed to marry without their masters' consent, especially when the couple did not belong to the same owner. It was rare, they said, that slaves married. They claimed that the retention by the master of the right to approve his slaves' spouses was in the best interest of the slaves. First, a good slave with a little property might marry "a very indifferent" slave who would "not fail to ruin and corrupt him." Second, the slave was the property of his master, whom the laws had placed under his care and control, and over whom the master should be allowed to exercise the rights of the "head of a family." Since it was in the interest of the master that his slaves should be happy, the tie binding the master and his slaves "ought . . . to be kept up and rendered more binding, instead of breaking it by compelling the master to become indifferent to an act on which may perhaps depend the fate and even the life of a slave for whom he has an affectionate regard." Notwithstanding the speciousness of the claim of the "affectionate regard" of a slave master for his breathing "property," a regard so strong that the master should claim the right to approve his slave's choice of a spouse for the slave's "own" sake, the planters' arguments point to the difficulties of maintaining the family as a stable institution under slavery conditions. If, for example, stable conjugal unions were contracted between slaves belonging to different owners, what would happen to "property rights" in slaves?

It was a similar consideration of “property rights” that made the planters perceive a danger in allowing spouses and their children under the age of fourteen to be sold together in the same lot. Since the slaves “rarely” married, they maintained that a clear distinction should be made between the “natural” and the “legitimate” father of a slave child. They said that the “greatest inconvenience” would result if the natural but not the legitimate father of the child had the right of custody over the child on account of the following reasons:

One female often has many children from as many different fathers.

A negress after declaring that such a black is the father of her child, will often point out a second and a third person as the father

Several blacks may present themselves at the same time as the fathers of the same child.

If the mother should happen to die, who is to be fixed upon as the father?

Creoles are known to give during their whole lives the name of father to all the blacks who have cohabited with their mother.

Slaves cannot be allowed the right of ascertaining who is the father, when according to our laws, that right is severely prohibited to free persons.

If the natural father is to have the same right as a legitimate father, the slaves would persist in not contracting lawful marriages.

The above caricature of blacks seems to suggest that slavery had very little to do with the alleged rampant illegitimacy among the slaves. How would slaves contract “lawful” marriages when their owners claimed the right to approve the selection of their marriage partners, and when their marriages could not be solemnized by priests without their masters’ permission? What the planters were concerned about was not the stability of the slave family but the stability of their investment in the slave. To make that “property” more lucrative, the Colonial Committee suggested that the age of slave children sold in the same lot as their parents should be reduced from fourteen to ten.

Considerations of the stability and lucrativeness of property in slaves featured prominently in the other objections of the planters



to the adoption of the Trinidad Order in Council as a model for "ameliorative" laws in Mauritius and its dependencies. They declared unequivocally that to permit slaves by law to possess "any property" was "to create for them a new right, and consequently to introduce an innovation which ought never to be suffered without the utmost circumspection."

They foresaw a host of problems arising if the slaves were given the right to own property. First, "Can a black institute a suit against his master? Can he have him questioned in court, or put him upon his oath? How many causes of resentment will thus be created between master and slave?" Besides the bugbear of "property" (a slave) exercising the right to question "its" (his) owner about the property that "it" (he) owned—a situation possible only in a topsy-turvy world—there would be such problems as what the slaves would do with the property they acquired and who would inherit that property after their death. The planters asserted that experience had shown that the blacks would not be able to manage their property: Some of them would fritter away the property in "vain" acquisitions such as a watch, a gun and a horse; others might invest it in business, which they could not handle because of their illiteracy. They predicted that the death of a propertied black would be the signal for expensive squabbles and litigation among his supposed inheritors. "How are successions to be regulated between these people," they asked, "when there are scarcely two legitimate marriages to be found amongst them?" They did not know who would pay for the expensive litigations that would devour the disputed property.

The planters' representatives did not content themselves with dire predictions. "Affectionate" masters that they were, they wanted to avert disaster for the sake of both masters and slaves. On account of the novel idea of slaves' owning property, because of the slaves' inexperience in the ownership and management of property, they suggested that the more prudent thing to do was to permit the slaves to own only certain defined types of property. To do otherwise "would be to run headlong into a frightful state of

confusion," and to incur the risk of going backwards instead of forwards. If their suggestions were adopted, they hoped that there would be established between the slaves and their masters "a sort of community of interests, a confidence beneficial to both . . . ."

The tortuous arguments of the planters reflected their fear that the grant of property rights to the slaves might stimulate the slaves to demand the most precious of rights, namely, freedom and liberation from the planters' tyranny. That the slaves were capable of making property yield profit, the planters would acknowledge, for that was the basis of plantation slavery. What they would not stand, however, was a practice that might lead to the withering away of slavery. The point is clarified by the planters' opposition to compulsory manumission by purchase.

The Colonial Committee argued that to allow the slave to buy his freedom would constitute an invasion of the right to property and would sanction "the spoliation of the master." It said that the imperial government itself would be the first to acknowledge the fact that slaves were property. If the British government did not, how else could it explain its refusal to yield to the "injudicious wishes of the absolute abolitionists?" The imperial government had not yielded to the demand for the abolition of slavery because, they said, of its respect for "the first of all principles of justice, the respect due to private property." If the slaves were property, the planters could not see any justification for forcing the slave owners to part with their possession by compulsory purchase of manumission. "Is their property," they asked, "less sacred than any other? Have they not acquired it lawfully, and in consequence of the assistance and encouragement offered to them by the laws of their own country?"

Next, the Colonial Committee pointed out the "hardships" and "evil" that would result if the slaves had the right to buy their freedom or, to put it in another way, if "property" had the right to "expropriate" "its" owner. The first hardship was that the planters would be saddled with the costs of maintaining the "inoperative" slaves or, to use its own words, "dead weights." "It should



be observed," the committee explained, "that upon a plantation possessing two hundred slaves, there are [scarcely] one hundred engaged in labour; others do not earn the cost of their maintenance; these are the old and infirm of both sexes, and children. They are called dead weights; the others, who are effective, labour to support them." Those who worked to generate the means of supporting the "dead weights" were described as the "commanders," the "workmen," the sugar bakers, the blacks who tilled the ground, and the domestics. The most useful and the most "cunning" of the five categories were the first two and the last. If compulsory purchase of manumission were allowed, those likely to take advantage of it would be the three groups. Their pay and their "cunning" would be used to acquire the means to buy their freedom. If their masters agreed to their manumission, the masters would lose the most intelligent producers on the plantations, production would decline and the masters would be saddled with the burden of supporting the "dead weights." If the three groups were denied compulsory manumission, they would not work as efficiently as before and would use "sabotage" tactics to force their masters to sell them.

The planters also feared that economic warfare might ensue among the planters themselves. The owners of plantations might try to ruin their competitors or enemies by offering money to the most productive slaves on their competitors' estates to buy their freedom. The manumitted slaves would then work for their benefactors. Also, such evils as stealing and prostitution would increase among the slaves who would resort to them to get the money with which to buy their freedom. Finally, the slave proprietors themselves might become brutalized by the need to defend their interests against the "unfair" tactics of the slaves!

The reasons for opposing the abolition of taxes on manumissions were somewhat similar to the above. The planters said that "the manumitted slave seldom endeavours to seek for employment. Being wholly deprived of resources, he soon becomes vicious; and it is quite notorious that the greater part [of the slaves]



end by being sooner or later the receivers of the thefts of their old comrades, and the very worst subjects of the Colony." They said that they were not opposed to manumission as much if the enfranchised would hire themselves out to employers. Since the manumitted slaves preferred "laziness" and "vagrancy" to manual work, the planters suggested that the abolition of fees for manumissions should be coupled with the enactment of very stiff vagrancy laws.

The objections of the Colonial Committee to practically all sections of the Trinidad Order in Council guided Governor Cole in the drawing up of the draft "ameliorative" ordinance of September 1827. The ordinance was a sell-out to the planters. Luckily, it was not given royal assent for the following reasons given by William Huskisson, Secretary of State for the Colonies:<sup>20</sup>

1. The British Crown was not disposed to sanction "the permanent union in the same person" of the offices of Procureur-General and Protector of Slaves, nor would it permit the Protector of Slaves to own a plantation or slaves employed in agriculture.
2. The holding of markets on Sundays should be discontinued as soon as adequate provisions could be made for the religious instruction of slaves.
3. The carrying of the cane, in place of the whip, by slave overseers should be prohibited since an overseer accustomed to using the whip as "a stimulus to labour" might be tempted to use the cane also.
4. The witnessing of the punishment of a slave by six slaves belonging to the same owner should be permitted only if the owner could prove that it was impossible for him to secure the attendance of a free witness.
5. "The power of using the whip as the instrument for the correction of females cannot be entrusted to the Civil Commissaries or even to the Chief Commissary of Police. However well founded may be the opinion of the council [Governor's Council] respecting the moral character of the slaves, nothing, probably, could be more adapted to promote and perpetuate their vicious habits, than punishments so subversive of all feelings of self-respect." More gentle methods, rather than severe punishments, might help to reclaim the slaves.
6. The interests of the master should not be allowed to override the interest of his slave with respect to marriage.
7. The clause requiring the consent of the master and the Protector of Slaves to a slave's acquisition and alienation of property should apply only to immovable, and not to movable, property.
8. The Crown could not sanction the clause that would prevent voluntary man-

umission unless the Protector of Slaves was satisfied that the slave to be manumitted had the means of supporting himself sufficient enough to prevent his becoming "at any time a charge on the colony."

9. A slave should not be punished for preferring a complaint against his master unless he was convicted for "a calumnious charge from improper motives, that conviction proceeding upon adequate and legal evidence."

Huskinson directed that the draft ordinance should not be promulgated until changes had been made in it to remove the objections that he raised.

Before Cole left office in 1828 he enacted a new ordinance, Ordinance No. 34 of May 14, 1828, to "simplify" the formalities of granting manumissions. The master wishing to enfranchise his slave still had to advertise his intent in order to afford creditors the opportunity of contesting the proposed manumission; he was still required to petition the governor for leave to manumit his slave, but he was spared the trouble of going to a public notary to draw up a deed of manumission. "All" that he had to do after completing the first two steps was to attach to the petition a certificate from the *procureur-général* certifying that there was no opposition to the proposed manumission, and a certificate from the registrar of slaves certifying that the slave had been duly registered. Once the foregoing formalities had been complied with, the governor would issue "at once" an act confirming the emancipation; the act would be registered free of charge and delivered to the owner *gratis*. The additional requirements were: (1) If the slave to be emancipated was fifty years of age or above, or was an infirm slave, the master had to enter into a bond "to provide for and maintain such slave as long as the said slave shall live." (2) If the slave was under fourteen years of age, the master had to sign a bond to support him until he completed his fourteenth year. If the master broke either bond, he would, on conviction, be liable to pay a penalty of from £50 to £200 for the benefit of the enfranchised.<sup>21</sup>

Ordinance No. 34 of May 14, 1828, received royal assent for want of a better law. Sir George Murray praised Cole and his council for the improvements that they made, but he observed that

there were still serious defects in the law regulating enfranchisement. He could not understand the reason why a petition to the governor for leave to emancipate a slave should be a necessary prerequisite for manumission. "No good cuase has been suggested," he said, "why the grant of freedom should be fettered with this species of restraint, from which all other legal grants between private persons are exempt." Although he did not doubt that Cole's successor would improperly withhold his consent to the petitions, nevertheless "the interference of the government upon this subject appears to be needless." He remarked that Cole's ordinance would prevent the enfranchisement of an unregistered slave. He thought that the proper thing to do was to penalize the slave master who did not register his slave and not the slave. He considered the condition imposed on the manumission of a slave who had reached the age of fifty needlessly rigid. He thought that the owner of such a slave should not be required to undertake to provide for the support of the slave until the slave's death; rather, it would be sufficient to require the master to engage that the manumitted slave would not be a burden to the public.

Lastly, he found fault with the phrasing of the provision governing testamentary manumissions. "It would be impossible," he said, "to comply with a law which requires that the same formalities should be observed in the case of manumissions by will as in the case of manumissions by deed or contract." He thought that what Cole meant was "that those acts which, when the transaction takes place *inter vivos*, are to be done by the owner, shall, in case of testamentary manumissions, be done by his heirs." Sir George Murray instructed Colville to remedy the defects by an additional legislation.<sup>22</sup>

When Cole left Mauritius and its dependencies to assume the governorship of the Cape Colony, he was accorded a warm farewell by the big planters and influential businessmen. They had many reasons to cherish his tenure of office. His acceleration of the road-building program initiated by Farquhar improved the means



of travel and the movement of goods on land. His administration saw the reduction of the duties on Mauritian sugar imported into Britain, a measure that helped to make sugar king in the colony. His "ameliorative" measures confirmed, rather than weakened, proprietary authority and "rights" over slaves. They wished that his active and beneficial governorship had lasted longer; since it could not be extended, they hoped that his successor would be as considerate and understanding as he was. They were not disappointed, for Colville turned out to be as helpful—as reactionary from the slaves' point of view—as Cole.

The question of what should be an appropriate ordinance for "improving" the conditions of slavery in the colony was raised at the very beginning of Colville's administration. In the address that the Colonial Committee presented to him on August 11, 1828, the planters expressed hope that his ordinance would be similar to Cole's draft ordinance on the subject. Although the "coloured" slave owners were not represented on the Colonial Committee, they shared the big planters' fear about "unfair" inroads into property rights. The attitudes of the other "Free Persons of Colour" are not clear. If we are to believe the private assurances that some of them gave to Commissioners Colebrooke and Blair, some were "more generally inclined to cooperate in the measures" approved by the British government for "ameliorating" the conditions of slavery, for "as petitioners for the acquirement of civil rights they were . . . less disposed to join in remonstrances against the adoption of those means . . . ." <sup>23</sup> Colville took note of the planters' view and the objections raised by Huskisson in his despatch of March 19 in framing Ordinance No. 43 of February 7, 1829.

Colville's ordinance came into force on March 20, 1829. It provided for the appointment of a Protector of Slaves and of Assistant Protectors in the several districts of the colony. Unpaid civil magistrates drawn from "the men that mattered" filled the latter positions, but the planters were unhappy that the Protector,

R. M. Thomas, was a Briton, a man without sentimental ties with the colony, a man who was "uninformed" or "ill-informed" about its mores and folkways.

On assuming office, Thomas published notices of his intended visit to the various plantations in order to explain the nature and working of the law to the slaves, but the notices raised such a howl of opposition from the planters that he was forced to cancel his "didactic visit."<sup>24</sup> The planters were not satisfied with the cancellation of the visit. They sent a delegation to him to find out the nature of his duties. Perhaps unbalanced by the quick opposition of the plantocrats, he explained that "it would be his duty to protect the slaves from any oppression or injury to which their unfortunate situation might expose them, and in all cases to obtain for them strict justice," but that "it was not intended that he should defend their cause, right or wrong; on the contrary, it would be his special care to impress upon their minds, that the measure of protection afforded to them would be proportionate to their good conduct, industry and obedience to their masters."<sup>25</sup>

Protector Thomas kept his word and added to his official duties the role of a disciplinarian. Ordinance No. 43 of 1829 called for two half-yearly reports to be made by the protector. In the report dated June 24, 1829, covering the period from March 20, to June 24, Protector Thomas stated that forty-three cases of slaves' complaints against their masters had been investigated. The complaints were made by slaves on the smaller plantations and those owned by "Free Persons of Colour."<sup>26</sup> In twenty-one of the cases, the complaints were found to be either "groundless" or "correct but frivolous," and the parties concerned were admonished according to the nature of the cases. Thirteen of the cases were proved to be "false" and "malicious," and in some of them the slaves seemed to have behaved in a "tumultuous" and "insubordinate" manner. Punishments were given to the slaves that "lied" in the presence of other slaves and of the Assistant Protector of the district concerned. The public chastisement was intended to teach a lesson to the slaves as a whole. Either before or after the chastisement, the

Assistant Protector, acting on instruction from Protector Thomas, addressed the slaves in the Creole language and made them understand

that it was with regret the Protector saw himself compelled to have recourse to such measures; but that he thought he could not better discharge the arduous duty confided to him, than by bringing them to a full sense of their duty to their masters, and to those acting under their authority; and that it was upon the exact observance of these duties, and upon their good conduct and industry, the title of the slaves to the beneficent intentions of His Majesty's Government could best be founded.<sup>27</sup>

The exemplary punishments and the manner in which they were administered must have brought smiles to the lips of the smaller proprietors and to the large ones. The latter got additional satisfaction from Thomas's report, for it was stated that no complaints had been received from "the more extensive establishments, several of which are, to the Protector's knowledge, conducted with much attention to the comfort, happiness and moral improvement of the slaves." Nine cases were referred to the procureur-general for prosecution.<sup>28</sup>

The Protector called attention to several matters that required remedial action. He said that, although he found it very difficult to prove that the slave masters did not comply with that part of Ordinance No.43 of 1829 referring to food, clothing and time allowed for meals, there was scarcely a complaint made by a slave against his master that did not include a charge that he was badly fed. Another frequent complaint was that slaves were compelled to work on Sundays beyond the time allowed by the exceptions to the ban on Sunday labor. He was inclined to believe that complaints about Sunday chores (such as gathering food for and cleaning horses and cattle) would continue; he suggested that such chores be performed in the afternoon of Saturday. The Protector called attention to that portion of Cole's chain ordinance which prohibited the putting of fetters or iron rings on the feet of female slaves under the age of fifteen. The Protector thought that the clause



meant that fetters should not be placed on the feet of women at all, but the proprietors interpreted it to mean that they could fether women above the age of fifteen. He recommended the abolition of the "Bar of Justice" and the practice of chaining slaves employed in small boats.<sup>29</sup>

The report of the Protector was not favorably received in official quarters. Governor Colville did not like some aspects of the report. He did not think that the "Bar of Justice" was so objectionable "an engine of punishment" as Protector Thomas had imagined. He favored the retention of "some punishment" for those slaves "who will not earn their master's food without it." He said that the law was specific with respect to the intervals of rest allowed on working days, that "the blacks have quite sense enough not to allow themselves to be often imposed upon in these particulars," and that "while the Protector thinks the slaves' day of rest too much interfered with, the police and the proprietors complain of its being converted into one of debauchery and tumult." Finally, the governor did not think that the time was a good one to alter the regulations regarding food and clothing: "Where the value of slaves has risen to the enormous price it has here, it has not been thought necessary to alter the laws regarding their food and clothing."<sup>30</sup> It is not necessary to comment on these points for they illustrate sufficiently the pro-planter attitude of the governor.

Lord Goderich, the Colonial Secretary, was displeased with the report for quite different reasons. He noted the Protector's insufficient supervision and ineffective control of the Assistant Protectors in their administration of the slave laws. He remarked that the "complaint book" (the register for recording the complaints of slaves against their masters) contained a large proportion of cases in which the Protector had sentenced the slaves, who complained about their masters, to punishment without adequate evidence that the slaves merited the punishments. In spite of the serious mistakes made by the Protector, Goderich expressed hope that the Protector would do a better job in the future. "I can make great allowances," he told Governor Colville, "for the inexperience of Mr. Thomas,

and the difficulties which must arise out of the novelty of his office and the prejudices against which he has to contend." Although he was disposed to be lenient, he expected from the Protector "in future such an effectual performance of his duties as will enable me to accept his continued services in the office of Protector of Slaves for Mauritius." Goderich also told Colville that he was unable to accept Colville's doubt about the impropriety of the use of the "Bar of Justice."<sup>31</sup>

The second report of the Protector of Slaves was issued on December 28, 1829, for the period July 1 to December 24. As in the preceding period, the Protector acted as the unappointed disciplinarian for the slave owners. There were ninety-three cases of slaves' complaints against their masters. He settled thirty-two of them by admonishing both parties, and reported twenty-eight to the law officers for prosecution; thirty-three complaints were found to be "false" and "malicious." The Protector said that some of the latter were "marked, more or less, by flagrant acts of insubordination tending to disorder and mutiny, and which it became essentially necessary to suppress by various degrees of punishment, according to the extent of crime . . . ." In one case he awarded the highest punishment (fifty strokes) that the law empowered him to impose. He said that he imposed the punishments because he felt that it was his duty "to screen the master from the injurious effects of the craft and malice of the slave . . . ." <sup>32</sup> The awards of punishment indicate that the initial hostile reaction of the planters to his appointment had made him an "intelligent" and quick learner of the mores and folkways of the colony!

The larger planters had something in the second report for which they cheered. The Protector of Slaves found that "with respect to the Sunday corvées and meal-hours, the evil complained of does in many instances exist, especially on the second and third rate plantations, where want of capital induces economy of time and labour . . . ." With respect to the larger plantations, he interpreted the absence of complaints from the slaves on them as an indication that those slaves were better treated than the ones on the smaller



plantations. He said that he saw "with the greatest gratification the good order, contentment and comfort that prevailed upon" the bigger plantations that he visited. His conviction that the slaves on the larger plantations were well treated and contented was strengthened by his random check of the planters' punishment records. Although the law did not authorize him to do so, the Protector of Slaves, with a view to including some information about punishment in those plantations in his report, asked for a copy of the registers kept on each of the six principal plantations in the districts. From the data furnished he made an abstract of punishments that indicated that on some plantations "no punishment coming within the range of those directed to be registered has taken place," and that on others the punishments were "few and light." On the rest, however, the punishments were more frequent and of a grave nature that raised the question whether it was lawful for a master to flog a slave and put him in confinement, in chains, or in stocks for one single offense. The Protector promised to submit a case of this nature for the ruling of the law officers. He was cheered, however, by the fact that only 421 offenses were committed by the slaves on the plantations surveyed, the number of whom he estimated to be not less than 12,000. He hardly expected to see such a relatively low "crime" rate among slaves "so immured to ignorance, and so deprived of instruction, moral and religious," and attributed it to the "wise" and "beneficent" management of the estates.<sup>33</sup>

Lord Goderich did not share the Protector's optimism that a low crime rate on the larger plantations and the absence of complaints from the slaves there constituted suitable criteria for judging the treatment of slaves generally. He was disappointed by the fact that in some instances the Protector had sentenced slaves to receive what appeared to be a severe punishment for making false or malicious complaints against their masters. He remarked also that the Protector had neglected to take steps to punish those slave owners who appeared to have broken the slave laws.<sup>34</sup>

The third report of the Protector of Slaves, covering the period



from December 25, 1829, to June 24, 1830, did not inspire much confidence. After fifteen months in office the Protector of Slaves was still acting more as the unappointed and unpaid disciplinary agent of the slave owners and less as the officer officially appointed to protect the slaves from ill-treatment. His stewardship had not been entirely barren, however. He had collected information sufficient to reinforce what was already known about the burden of oppression that the slaves bore. He had called attention to excessive and illegally blended punishments dished out to the slaves; now he revealed that slaves awaiting trial on criminal charges were detained for months in prison before being brought to trial, and that some slaves who had been acquitted of the charges brought against them were detained for weeks after being cleared of the charges.<sup>35</sup>

Earlier, the Protector had uncovered several cases of illegal detention of slaves in slavery for several decades. One case involved a female slave, one Marceline. In 1801 her master, one Monsieur Morin, bequeathed her liberty to her in his will; he directed that the expenses of her formal manumission should be paid out of his estate by his executor, one Monsieur Le Sur. After Morin's death, Marceline reminded Le Sur about the formal manumission, but Le Sur told her that there was no need to incur the heavy expenses involved in manumission, and that she might remain in his house as a "free" woman, with freedom to work for herself. She was not enfranchised until 1828, when her lover paid Le Sur's son the sum of \$300. The payment was made because Le Sur's son claimed that Marceline was originally Le Sur's slave and that Morin had never paid her price to Le Sur.<sup>36</sup> Another case involved the seven descendants of two slaves, Louis and Françoise. The latter were freed by their owner in 1803, but their descendants did not gain their freedom until April 1831.<sup>37</sup>

The most notorious of the cases involved six persons illegally detained in slavery since January 18, 1797. Protector Thomas reported this case, as well as the other two, in 1829, but further investigation delayed action on the case till 1830, when he asked a

lower court to award the six persons \$38,560 as compensatory damages. The court denied the application in a ruling given on November 3, but the Protector appealed the case. In April 1831 the Court of Appeals declared the persons concerned free, but said that "as the law did not at the period in question permit slaves to possess property of their own . . . the demand now made cannot in strictness be maintained." The Court of Appeals did, however, order the master of the "slaves" to pay \$100 each to the three original "slaves" and \$200 to the two children of the remainder, who were now deceased. The child of the third "slave" died before the ruling of the appellate court and was, therefore, not awarded any compensation.<sup>38</sup>

In spite of the creditable points noted above, it had become clear by the summer of 1830 that the policy of amelioration had not worked and that it might not work. The colonial secretary's plaintive review of the fifteen months' stewardship of Protector Thomas is a sufficient illustration of the former and partially indicative of the latter. In a dispatch to Governor Colville dated April 19, 1831, Lord Goderich commented at length on the failure of Colville's administration to make amelioration work. He attributed the failure partly to the imperfections in Colville's ameliorative ordinance (No. 43 of 1829), "which varied in so many essential respects from the model which had been prescribed," and partly to the failure of the Protector of Slaves to enforce energetically the defective ordinance. The greatest blame, however, was placed on Colville's administration. First, Colville had not acted on the suggestions that Protector Thomas offered to cure the defects found in the law. Second, the law officers of the colonial government had failed to assist the Protector to the best of their ability in the enforcement of the law. "The Protector thus standing alone," Goderich regretted, "and with no other assistance than that of the usual magistracy, for the investigation of cases lying beyond his immediate cognizance, could not fairly be expected to succeed in giving complete effect to the law . . . ." The governor had, moreover, failed to realize, and to impress upon Protector



Thomas, "that an operation of the slave law, so partial and feeble as that which these reports [the three reports of the Protector of Slaves] exhibit, if in some measure excusable hitherto, could no longer continue without exciting the serious displeasure of the King's Government."<sup>39</sup>

Colville was asked to watch very carefully the enforcement of the law "with respect to its spirit and purposes," and to remove promptly and completely whatever obstacles might obstruct the effective execution of the law. He was also asked to make "a strict revision . . . of the whole of the Protector's proceedings, and especially of that portion of them which is recorded in the complaint book." Goderich himself promised to make "the best selection in my power of persons" to act as the assistants of the Protector in the administration of the law in the rural districts.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, those persons were never appointed. This omission as well as many of the factors discussed above nullified the execution of the Order in Council issued on February 2, 1830, to make amelioration work not only in Mauritius and its dependencies, but also in other British Crown colonies where plantation slavery existed.

The Order in Council of February 2, 1830, repealed all laws (for "improving" the conditions of slavery in the British colonies) that had been passed since the Trinidad Order in Council of March 10, 1824, including the latter. The new slave law defined the duties of the Protector and Assistant Protectors of Slaves, prohibited Sunday work with exceptions, regulated the punishment of slaves, endowed slaves with certain property rights, and laid down rules regarding the separation of slave families and the manumission of slaves. Since the new law was considerably better than the slave laws it replaced, I shall explain its major provisions under the above headings.

A Protector of Slaves had to be appointed in each Crown colony. The existing holders of the office were to be retained. The Protector could not have an interest in slaves and in lands cultivated by slaves, nor could he manage plantations worked by slaves; he



could, however, hire slaves as domestic servants if the governor of the colony in which he served was satisfied that free persons were not available for hire. The Protector was to be assisted by Assistant Protectors appointed to the several districts of each colony. The Protector or Assistant Protector was to be notified of all prosecutions against slaves in capital or transportable cases, of suits affecting the right of slaves to freedom and property, and of prosecutions for offenses against their persons; in all these cases, the Protector or Assistant Protector would attend the court on behalf of the slaves concerned. In cases of complaints by slaves or against slaves, these officials could not act as magistrates.<sup>41</sup>

Slaves were not to work for the profit of their owners or managers on Sundays. The prohibition did not, however, apply to slaves usually employed as domestics and slaves required to tend cattle. The law also permitted the employment of slaves in "any work of necessity." The governor of each colony was to define by proclamation what works came under the latter category, but a notice was to be given to the Protector of Slaves in every case when slaves were employed in "works of necessity."

The whip was not to be carried into the fields as "a stimulus to labour" or as "an emblem of authority"; it was to be used only for the punishment of offenses previously committed by slaves. The new law declared as illegal the flogging or beating of female slaves. It permitted, however, the application of the cane to female slaves under ten years of age in the same manner as the caning of female pupils in schools. For offenses committed by female slaves above ten years of age, the punishment could be imprisonment, confinement in stocks, or other punishments prescribed by the governor. A male slave was not to receive more than twenty-five lashes for an offense and more than the same number of strokes in a single day, nor should he be whipped as long as unhealed scars remained on his body. In cases of domestic flogging, a free person or six slaves had to be present. The restrictions on the corporal punishment of male slaves were, however, not to apply to flogging imposed as a result of judicial decisions rendered by courts of competent jurisdiction.

The Protector and Assistant Protectors of Slaves were required to deliver annually punishment books to the managers of slaves employed in agricultural or "manufacturing" labor for the purpose of recording all punishments inflicted on slaves. The recordings were to state the age and sex of the offender, the time and place the offense was committed, the nature of the punishment given to the slave, the person who prescribed the punishment, and the names of the persons who witnessed the punishment. Illiterate managers of plantations were required to employ literate persons to keep the records for them. The managers were required to transmit half-yearly returns of entries in the punishment book to the Protector or Assistant Protector and to affirm on oath the correctness of the entries. The returns were to be transmitted by the Assistant Protectors to the Protector. If the Assistant Protectors owned plantation slaves, they were to make their own returns directly to the Protector.

The new law declared slaves competent to marry after obtaining licenses issued by the Protector or Assistant Protector. The consent of the owner or owners of slaves was required before the license would be issued. If the slave owner refused to give the requested permission, he would be summoned to explain the reasons for the refusal. If the Protector was satisfied that the proposed marriage would not be injurious to the slave or slaves, he would issue the license even if the master or masters still objected to the marriage. Marriages among slaves did not, however, diminish the "legal rights" that the owner had over his slaves. Married slaves were not to be separated from their spouses, or from their children under sixteen years of age, in the execution of a court judgment, on the death of the owner intestate, or by conveyance or will.

The new law laid down rules for the manumission of slaves. It empowered slave owners to manumit their slaves at their own pleasure; if the slave or slaves were jointly owned, the concurrence of the joint owners was required before the slave or slaves could be manumitted. All taxes or fees on manumission were abolished. If a master manumitted a slave under six years of age, or a slave who was over fifty years old or in a state of infirmity, that master was



required to sign a bond pledging £200 for the maintenance and care of the child slave until he attained the age of fourteen, or of the aged or infirm slave until his death. The bond was not required in the case of manumissions by will, but the estate of the testator remained liable as if the bond had been executed. Manumissions by purchase could be consummated only through the agency of the Protector, the latter acting for and on behalf of the slaves. There was also provision for compulsory manumission by purchase.

The Order in Council of February 2, 1830, was received in Mauritius on August 6 of that year, and was put into effect by Colville's proclamations of September 9 and 22. The Order in Council created a stir in the colony. Planters were disturbed not only by its "stringent" provisions, but also by its timing. After the publication of the report of the Commissioners of Eastern Inquiry in 1829, the abolitionists in Britain intensified their efforts to use Mauritius as an experiment for the abolition of slavery in the Crown colonies of Britain. The abolitionists wanted all the slaves imported into Mauritius and its dependencies after 1813 declared free on the ground that the slaves had been imported illegally. The planters attributed the "stringent" provisions of the Order in Council to the "machinations" of the abolitionists, whom they accused of attempting to destroy the foundation of the colony's prosperity while leaving intact that of the British West Indies, the interests of which were represented in British Parliament by powerful absentee planters.

After consultations, they despatched Adrien d'Epinay (who had emerged as the fulcrum of planters' opposition to amelioration and the feared abolition of slavery) to Britain to seek redress for their grievances. D'Epinay spent a year in Britain, lobbying for a promise that there should be no abolition without compensation to the slave owners. He asked for other concessions, which included the abolition of press censorship, the political representation of the "population" (Franco-Mauritians) in the colonial legislature, and access of the creole population to public employment based only on merit. D'Epinay returned to Mauritius on October 25, 1831,



and gave an account of his mission to his compatriots on November 2.<sup>42</sup> The d'Epinay mission was partially successful. The press censorship was lifted, and in 1832 d'Epinay founded *Le Cernéen*, the first nongovernment-controlled newspaper in Mauritius. Shortly thereafter, the "Free Persons of Colour" founded *La Balance* for the defense of their own interests. On January 25, 1832, the Council of Government, on which the representatives of the white planters and businessmen sat, met for the first time.

In the meantime concerted efforts were underway to dilute or obstruct the execution of the Order in Council of February 1830. The efforts were concerted by the planters themselves, but the governor contributed to their intransigence by his own examples. A few illustrations will suffice. In the proclamation that Colville issued on September 22, he declared that the law forbade the employment of slaves on Sunday for the benefit of their master, but that it did not prohibit slaves from engaging themselves on that day as artisans, gardeners, "workmen" in the sugar mills, or otherwise for their own benefit. The Order in Council had left it to the colonial governors to define "works of necessity" that slaves might legally do on Sundays. Colville took advantage of the obscurity of that provision of the law to make it more obscure. He defined a "work of necessity" to mean one in which the labor of the slave was "urgently necessary," or one in which it was required to prevent "great and irreparable loss." As Goderich later observed, the word "urgently" scarcely clarified the meaning of "works of necessity," and "the loss sustained by stopping the sugar works for twenty-four hours on any Sunday of the year may be both 'great' and 'irreparable.' Yet it cannot be therefore meant that the mills shall always be worked on that day." Also, "the right of compelling slaves to cut down crops, and to expose and carry sugar for drying on Sunday, is given in terms of such latitude as nearly to destroy all security for the real observance of the repose of that day."<sup>43</sup> Goderich made these remarks in his despatch to Colville dated June 24, 1831. By then, however, the damage had been done. The planters' defiant heads and hearts had

issued their own proclamations to obstruct the enforcement of the law.

The reports of the Protector of Slaves from the end of 1830 onwards are "tales" of increasing opposition of the planters to "amelioration"; the opposition reached a dramatic height in 1832, "diminished" in 1833, and continued thereafter until the policy of "humanizing" slavery was jettisoned in 1835. The slaves replied to their oppressors' intransigence by committing various kinds of offenses and "sabotage." I shall discuss these developments in some detail.

The planters registered their opposition to the law by refusing to acknowledge the authority of the Protector of Slaves and to submit punishment data to him. In the period January to June 1831 the number of plantation managers who submitted their returns was only twenty-one. Two estates contained twenty and forty-seven slaves respectively. The other estates contained from one slave to seven slaves each. Seventy-five slaves were recorded as having received eighty-nine punishments, the average number of strokes being fifteen. Seventy-seven slave owners, including the "improving" slave lord Charles Telfair, reported absence of punishments on their estates. The number of slave proprietors who refused to submit punishment records was nearly 1,300. Besides refusing to submit punishment data, the planters actively resisted the Protector's exercise of his duties. The district of Flacq led the way. Planters in that district refused to answer the complaints brought against them by the slaves or to permit the slaves to be examined on the charges. By April 1831 each district had let the government know that it would, as Protector Thomas put it, "set the law altogether at defiance."<sup>44</sup>

During the second half of 1831 the managers of nineteen estates, including some in the Seychelles, submitted returns of punishment records. Those who failed to submit the required records were 1,000. Although the latter figure was less than the number of defaulters during the preceding period, "the refusal," Protector Thomas reported, "to comply with the provisions of the law with



respect to returns of punishments has not been less general throughout the colony."<sup>45</sup>

Another instrument of planters' opposition to the alien law was the delay of justice. The accumulated number of cases awaiting trial for infringements of the slave law was 2,609 in 1831, broken down as follows: (1) Criminal cases instituted against slaves during the period from April 1830 to July 1, 1831, 19; from July 1 to December 31, 31. (2) Criminal cases recommended against slave masters during the period March 30, 1830-December 31, 1831, 163. (3) Criminal cases against defaulters during the year ending in October 1831, 2,296.<sup>46</sup> When slave owners were convicted for breaking the law, the law courts generally awarded the minimum penalties prescribed by the law. "Such a uniformity of decision," the Colonial Office remarked, "in cases which must necessarily have presented many various features is hardly reconcileable with that minute discrimination which is essential to a due execution of the law." The comment continued: "Neither is it apparent whether Sir C. Colville has taken any extraordinary measures in consequence of the extraordinary opposition offered to the law."<sup>47</sup>

Procureur-General Prosper d'Epinay, brother of Adrien d'Epinay, attributed the slow disposal of cases to overworked courts and the complicated legal procedure inherited from the French administration. He said that the trial of all criminal cases was suspended in July 1831 to facilitate the preparation of a new criminal code, which was started in August. Pressed by Thomas, Prosper d'Epinay decided in December 1831 to "expedite" matters by prosecuting only cases of a grave nature, and turning over the prosecution of the less serious ones to the Protector himself. The latter was in a quandary; he did not know who would decide the gravity of the offenses, nor did he know who would pay court costs if a private lawyer prosecuted the "less serious" cases for the Protector of Slaves and lost them.<sup>48</sup> The planters cared less about the Protector's difficulties, for he had turned his back on them and become the "friend" of the slaves!

The twisting of the tail of the British lion by court tactics was not



let up in 1832. The Protector turned to Lawyer Koenig of the Mauritius Bar for help. Koenig agreed to prosecute the Protector's share of the cases, but he withdrew his offer on February 13, 1832. The Protector ascribed the withdrawal to a "combination" that he believed "exists among the law practitioners to decline all business from this office, with a view to frustrate and embarrass the administration of the slave amelioration law." He said that he was strengthened in his belief by "a recollection of the difficulty I experienced in my letter to the acting Chief Secretary of 19th November last [1831]." <sup>49</sup> A copy of the letter in which the Protector made these remarks was leaked to the members of the Bar, and they threatened to sue him for libel. While the threatened suit dangled in the air, the backlog of untried cases against infractions of the slave law continued to increase. By the end of June 1832 the arrears amounted to 3,354. Again the Protector sought the help of the colony's law officers. The advocate-general agreed to prosecute the cases in arrears. The cases were sent to him on April 2, but the heightened opposition and rebellion of the planters in the spring and summer of that year practically put a stop to the prosecution of the cases. <sup>50</sup> Some of the major figures in the deepening struggle were John Jeremie, the d'Epinay brothers and Governor Colville himself. The Council of Government provided as much forum as the several districts for the venting of pent-up feelings.

As a result of the increased agitation in Britain by the members of the Anti-Slavery Society, who were dissatisfied with the pace and quality of "amelioration" in Mauritius as well as elsewhere, the British government appointed John Jeremie, a former Chief Justice of St. Lucia, as Mauritius's Procureur and Advocate General on January 1, 1832. Jeremie was well known in the Anti-Slavery circles, and had written a pamphlet in favor of an immediate abolition of slavery. News of his appointment reached Mauritius in March. At the same time, the colony received the Order in Council of November 2, 1831, which repealed the Order in Council of February 2, 1830, and provided more stringent rules

to regulate slavery in the British Crown colonies. The Mauritian planters were greatly disturbed by the two events, which they interpreted as a sign that the slaves were about to be freed. The news spread very rapidly and caused a ferment among both the proprietors and the slaves. Fires broke out in several places. It is not clear who was responsible for them. The proprietors were certain that the fires were the work of the slaves, who had become increasingly restive.<sup>51</sup> It is not unlikely, however, that the planters had a hand in the fire outbreaks, and that the incendiary outbursts were a smokescreen for the formation of planters' "volunteer" corps for the "strengthening" of peace. The obliging Governor Colville granted the planters permission to form the corps. Volunteers were immediately raised and organized in Port Louis and in the districts by the Colonial Committee.

Jeremie arrived in Port Louis in the night of June 3, 1832. At seven o'clock in the morning of June 4, he went ashore under the protection of a military escort in spite of the opposition of the planters. He took his oath of office and was sworn in as a member of the Government Council. His presence triggered various forms of protests. All shops were closed and provisions were in short supply; the members of the Bar refused to attend the courts; addresses poured in from many districts, asking the governor to oust Jeremie. At first the governor did not act on the request, and June 22 was scheduled as the day when Jeremie would be installed as procureur-general before the Supreme Court. When that morning dawned, the front of the Government House was occupied by his opponents; they were determined to prevent his formal installation. The crowd was so thick that he was forced to take the rear door of the Government House to get to the court house. A tense moment occurred when he emerged from the court house en route back to the Government House. Refusing to be outwitted by "rear exit" tactics, the crowd mobbed Jeremie; the mob was charged by Jeremie's escort and a few persons were arrested.<sup>52</sup>

The planters refused to accept defeat. Addresses were sent from all the districts to the governor, objecting to Jeremie's continued



stay in the colony. At last Colville was forced to act. On July 7 he summoned an extraordinary session of the Council of Government, to which were invited not only the official and unofficial members of the council, but also the representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and other notables. The notables, "the most deeply interested and best informed inhabitants" of Mauritius, advised the governor that the only way to restore order was to "invite" Jeremie to "withdraw" himself from Mauritius.<sup>53</sup>

At the session of the council held on July 9, Jeremie stated his objections to the "invitation" extended to him. The governor, however, agreed with the notables that "Jeremie's continuance in the Colony could not, for the present, be attended with any good, but might occasion great and irreparable mischief"; he "advised" Jeremie to return to England "as the only means of bringing the affairs of the Colony back to their former condition . . . ." The council was even generous, for it resolved that "all the expense consequent on Jeremie's departure should be borne by the Colony and be provided for in the estimate of the following year!"<sup>54</sup>

Colville's first order for Jeremie's ouster was issued on July 16, 1832. Jeremie was asked to bear the governor's dispatches on the nature and function of the office of the former, and to convey "other important matter, in which his talent and general experience will, it is expected, on the explanations he will be enabled to afford to His Majesty's government, be found available in forwarding the interests of this colony."<sup>55</sup> In a letter transmitting the order to Jeremie, Colville said: "From a conversation I have had with you, I understand that a communication of a more peremptory nature will be required by you, before absenting yourself from this island: I therefore request to be favoured by you with a draft of the form it should be made out in."<sup>56</sup> Jeremie protested again at the whole affair, but he did suggest to the governor that the government order should make it clear that Jeremie was "required and peremptorily ordered, on his duty as a public officer, to conform to . . . the governor's express commands." The governor accepted the suggestion and reworded the order to make it "peremptory."



The "improved" order was issued on July 18. At the end of the month Jeremie embarked for Britain, arriving there in October. On arrival he delivered Colville's dispatches to the Colonial Office and told the officials there that "he would be ready to resume his journey back to Mauritius at an hour's notice."<sup>57</sup>

The news of Jeremie's ouster reached Britain before his arrival there. The British government decided to remove Colville from his office and to appoint the stronger-minded General William Nicolay on September 8, 1832, in his place. After hearing Jeremie's account of the events, it issued an Order in Council in November, banning "armed associations, persons assembling for drill, without commission from his Majesty or the Governor . . . ." The Order in Council also declared that the commissions of the King, orders in councils, and similar instruments did not require registration in Mauritius's courts in order to have effect.<sup>58</sup>

Governor Nicolay arrived in Mauritius at the end of January 1833. He wasted no time in implementing his instructions. On February 4 he issued an order disbanding the planters' corps of "volunteers." He dismissed Colonel Draper, Prosper d'Epinay and other persons who had voted for Jeremie's ouster from the Council of Government. All discovered firearms were confiscated by the government. These measures were not enough as far as the abolitionists were concerned; they succeeded in persuading the British government to send Jeremie back to Mauritius as the procureur and advocate general.

Jeremie arrived in Mauritius in triumph at the end of April 1833. Unfortunately, his victory did not last very long. His downfall was due partly to his zealous devotion to abolition and partly to his desire to get even with his opponents. In August he arrested five planters of Grand Port on charges of plotting to resist the "legitimate power and authority" of the colonial government by force of arms. The men were detained until March 1834, when they were tried on the charges of reason, and acquitted. Before the trial Jeremie had challenged the competency of the three judges, including Chief Judge Blackmun, who made up the Supreme Court,

to try the case, and had tried to secure the appointment of a special court to try it. Unfortunately for him, he failed. He also failed to appeal the verdict of the court to the Privy Council. The Secretary of State for the Colonies was displeased with his behavior toward the Supreme Court Justices and by the long detention of the arrested men, and ordered his dismissal.<sup>59</sup> John Reddie, president of the lower court and a supporter of Jeremie, was also dismissed from office. Jeremie left for England in October. His ouster was loudly cheered.<sup>60</sup> Jeremie's behavior was partly responsible for Nicolay's decision to mend fences with the planters. On September 8, 1834, he permitted Prosper d'Epinay to resume his seat on the Council of Government. Five days earlier Nicolay had appointed him as the acting advocate general.<sup>61</sup> The Jeremie episode thus passed away without effecting any meaningful change in the status quo.

Not only did the planters weather the Jeremie storm with only minor scratches, but they also successfully resisted the efforts of the Protector of Slaves to enforce the "amelioration" laws. After the "Jeremie affair" of 1832, they eschewed overt acts of rebellion and resorted to the usual tactics of nonviolent resistance. Only a very small number of planters bothered to submit the required returns of punishment records. In the half year ending in June 1832, only thirty-five returns, including a few from the Seychelles and other dependencies of Mauritius, were submitted to the Protector. The number of such returns received during the second half of the year was only twenty-three. The number of slave owners or managers who failed to submit their returns numbered in the hundreds during each half year. At the end of June 1832 the number of prosecutions pending against the slave masters for ill-treatment of slaves and for nonsubmission of punishment data was 3,594; at the end of the year, the number had risen to 4,631.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to the above cases, the complaints of slaves "increase daily," the Protector reported in August 1832, "without even hope of affording them the smallest redress . . . ." The slaves who managed to reach the Protector's office were punished by



their masters for complaining to him. The Protector was in a dilemma. If he sent the slaves who complained back to their masters, the slaves would be subject to "cruel punishment." If, in order to save them from their masters' reprisals, he retained them at the *bagne*, he was told by the judge that it was against the law. If he reported the cases to the procureur-general the latter told him that the cases were not sufficiently grave to warrant their prosecution by the procureur-general. The so-called minor cases involved, the Protector added, "charges of cruelty by the infliction of illegal and excessive corporal punishment, and of torture, by putting the slave into chains and confining him with them on, in the stocks every night and during meal hours and on Sundays for a whole month, and in many instances much longer."<sup>63</sup>

The conditions did not change in 1833 and 1834. Each half year saw increased accumulation of fresh cases and arrears of cases pending against the slave proprietors for infractions of the slave laws. Toward the end of 1832 Governor Colville had persuaded the members of the Bar to help in the prosecution of the cases. The members had agreed to do so on the condition, as the Protector reported, that "they should not be expected to prosecute any other cases than those which they themselves might deem just and well founded." The Protector had considered their terms at variance with the Order in Council of February 2, 1830, and had declined to support the proposal. He had, however, in compliance with Colville's instructions, transmitted the cases in arrears to the acting procureur-general for distribution among the lawyers who had agreed to help.<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, little of the promised help was delivered. Only two of the lawyers tried to help. The result was that only thirteen of the almost two hundred cases distributed among the lawyers were brought before the courts by June 1833. One of the "active" lawyers had also agreed to serve under the Protector as a solicitor, but he was compelled by "a series of persecutions which threatened even his existence" to give up the appointment and to leave the colony.<sup>65</sup>

The procureur-general, the public prosecutor, still refused to



help the Protector of Slaves to reduce the "immense accumulation" of cases in arrears or to prosecute fresh defaulters. The refusal and the devotion of only one day of the week for the hearing of cases prosecuted on behalf of the Protector made it impossible for the latter to prosecute those who broke the slave laws. The Protector explained how the two factors operated as follows:

the Court of First Instance . . . is limited by law to one day in the week (Friday) for the hearing of police correctional cases generally, the rest of the week being dedicated to civil cases; and as all complaints under the slave laws (with the exception of those in which the Vice Admiralty has exclusive jurisdiction) come under that class, recent experience has shown that more than one case cannot be brought on weekly, nor even then finally decided; inasmuch as the Public Prosecutor claims "ex officio" precedence for all cases affecting public order and tranquility—so that suits at the instance of the Protector . . . are subjected to be so unduly and prejudicially delayed that, on an average, 25 of them can hardly be disposed of annually and those subject to further delay if carried into the Court of Appeal.<sup>66</sup>

Unassisted by the colonial law officers, and frustrated in his efforts to secure a reduction of the cases, the Protector of Slaves suggested an unusual remedy. He asked Governor Nicolay to appoint, if the law permitted, an English lawyer who was unconnected with Mauritius as an *ad hoc* judge or magistrate to try summarily all cases in arrears without appeal. He recommended that the judge should "sit daily without intermission until the whole of the arrears, as well as any new cases arising from complaints that may be made between [January 1, 1834] and February 1835 (when the present amelioration laws cease), shall have been decided."<sup>67</sup> Even if Nicolay had the power and were disposed to make such an appointment, few lawyers would accept the post of a "sit-in" judge for a period of thirteen months. This strange suggestion indicates the desperation of the Protector of Slaves and his attempts to make up for his earlier pro-planter stance; it might also indicate that he had really become, as the planters charged, the "friend" of the slaves.

As the intransigence of the planters increased, and the colonial officials (including Governor Nicolay himself) did little or nothing

about it, the slaves became more restive and unruly. Their favorite weapons were neglect of duty, theft, "careless" fires and "unintended" destruction of property, insubordination, "threatening behaviour," and marooning.<sup>68</sup> In the Seychelles, the slaves resorted to similar remedies, marooning being perhaps the most favored remedy. One of the leaders of the maroons, a slave named Castor, spent three or four years with his runaway group in the forests before emerging to accept the post of "commander" in the rickety Seychellois police force. From being a leader of outlaws, he became a catcher of his former comrades, a post that made him the planters' "favourite!"<sup>69</sup>

Increased offenses and crimes among the slaves elicited, of course, increased retaliation from their owners. Because the Protector was powerless to intervene, "amelioration" degenerated into a farce. In his last report, covering the period from July 1, 1834, to February 1, 1835, he stated that there were 643 cases pending against slave proprietors and slave managers for various offenses committed against the slave laws, of which 532 were in arrears. There were 6,590 cases of failure to submit data on punishments given on the plantations, 6,201 of which were in arrears. The Protector added: "During the last six months the total number of cases brought before the Courts by the public prosecutor and the Protector's Solicitor has been only 19 . . . ." In eight of these cases, the trial judges "left the Colony without giving judgment, so that it will be necessary to commence proceedings in them *de novo*."<sup>70</sup>

The flight of the judges took place almost at the very end of the period of "amelioration." The former event could scarcely have better illustrated the bankruptcy of the latter, or more appropriately anticipated its end.

### **Dents in the Color Bar**

The period of "amelioration," so barren in meaningful reforms for the benefit of the slaves, saw some gains for the "Free Persons



of Colour” in the form of access to public facilities and institutions. The gains were externally induced. As a result of the pressure of a small group of reform-minded people in Britain, the rigid walls of racial discrimination in the British plantation colonies began to show clearly visible cracks. In Mauritius and the Seychelles graded distinctions based on color persisted, but the pressures to admit nonwhites to public facilities and institutions could no longer be resisted. One of the first blocks to be dislodged from the segregationist edifice was Article 5 of the Letters Patent of December 1723, prohibiting marriages between whites and nonwhites. In 1827 the colonial government declared the article “contrary to those natural privileges which belong to the condition of a free man,” and “repugnant to the privileges of religion and good morals.”<sup>71</sup> A draft ordinance to repeal the obnoxious article was signed by Governor Cole on May 31 of that year. The belated acknowledgment of the “principles of religion” led to attempts to bury dead “coloureds” in the same burial grounds as the whites, but the latter resisted. White opposition was, however, withdrawn by 1835, and the dead were fully integrated. The equality with whites that had eluded the deceased “coloureds” in their lifetime was finally cornered in the grave!

In the area of education, “coloured” boys gained entry into the Royal College, the leading educational institution in the colony. The history of the college goes back to 1799, when the Colonial Assembly of Mauritius set up a central school. General Decaen confirmed its establishment in 1803 and changed its name to Lycée of Ile de France and Bourbon. Under the management of a small committee, the school flourished. In 1811 Governor Farquhar changed its name to the colonial college; two years later, it was changed again to the Royal College. The subjects taught at the college up to the establishment of British rule were French, the classics, history, geography, mathematics, drawing and military exercises.<sup>72</sup> Following its “reorganization” by Farquhar, English was added to the college’s curriculum. The college supported itself with the fees paid by the students, but it received large subsidies



from the colonial government.<sup>73</sup> Despite the fact that the Royal College was partially supported with government grants and advances, the college was not opened to "coloured" boys until 1832.

When the Royal College was integrated, the parents of the white students withdrew their children from it. Other white parents refused to send their children there for admission. White boycott caused such a serious decline in the revenue of the college that the government had to advance money to the college for the payment of professors' salaries. The Committee of Public Instruction, which supervised the management of the college, refused to withdraw the "coloured" students. By 1839 the white parents acknowledged the futility of further opposition to the presence of the "coloured" students and allowed full integration to work. By that date also, some "coloured" boys had been admitted into some of the private schools.<sup>74</sup>

The admission of "coloured" students into the Royal College enabled them to acquire the best formal education available in Mauritius at that time. Also, it opened the door to higher education. On leaving the college some students proceeded to France or England for further studies. Their favorite fields were law and medicine. The integration of the college had another significance: it gave the "coloureds" or "Free Blacks" the opportunity to prove that they could do as well as, or better than, white people if they were given the chance. From the late 1830s onward, the colonial government awarded scholarships annually to two of the best students in the college to enable them to do advanced studies in Britain. Some of the recipients of the scholarships in the 1840s were "coloured" students; in the early 1850s most of the winners of the scholarships were "coloured" students.<sup>75</sup>

The progress that the "Free Persons of Colour" made in secondary and higher education owed a great deal to the foundation laid by pioneering missionaries. Few among the pioneers stood out so prominently as John Le Brun, a congregational minister who was described by Governor Nicolay as "a gentleman of most unexceptional character."<sup>76</sup> His long and devoted work (beginning in 1814

and ending at his death in 1865) among the "coloureds" and freed slaves entitles him to be regarded as the "apostle" to the Mauritian blacks. Le Brun was ordained in Jersey, his native island in the English Channel, on November 25, 1813. He was appointed as a missionary to Mauritius by the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) and sailed for the island on January 1, 1814, arriving there on May 18.<sup>77</sup>

On his arrival at Port Louis, Charles Telfair introduced him to Governor Farquhar. The latter received Le Brun well and approved his plan to open a day school for the children of all races and classes; the plan was inserted in the government gazette in June. In September Le Brun opened a school with four boys. In a few weeks the enrollment increased to thirty.<sup>78</sup> The school emphasized religious instruction as well as the three R's. Le Brun also preached to the "coloureds" and slaves on Sundays, which activity aroused the opposition of the religious skeptics and the planters. The former, true children of the irreverence nurtured by the French Revolutionary fervor, promised to send Le Brun and his Bibles back to Britain as soon as Mauritius reverted to French possession, a hope that was never fulfilled. The planters feared the effect that liberal ideas might have on the slaves and did all they could to thwart Le Brun's efforts. For three years they ostracized him.<sup>79</sup>

In spite of the planters' opposition, Le Brun's work expanded. He was sustained by his own determination to succeed and by the "moral support" and assistance given by Farquhar and his successors. Farquhar, for example, allowed Le Brun to occupy a building rent free. When Le Brun later moved to another location, Colville "authorized the rent," he reported, "to be charged to the public [revenue]; the object being of a public nature."<sup>80</sup> By 1822 the three L.M.S. schools in Port Louis were said to be doing well. Two of the schools, one for boys and one for girls, were located in Port Louis; the third school was in the suburb, Malabar Town. In addition to the catechism and the three R's, the curriculum provided for the teaching of trades. In 1827, for example, 30 of the 150 pupils in the day school at Port Louis were learning trades.<sup>81</sup>



Between 1817 and 1833, a total of £4,610 was spent by the L.M.S. mission in Mauritius.<sup>82</sup>

Other missionaries, both Protestant and Catholic, followed Le Brun's example. One of the former was an African missionary named Jenkins. After completing his education in England, Jenkins was sent to Mauritius by the directors of the Lancastrian School, Borough Road. He opened a school on Marengo Street, Port Louis, in 1823 for the children of "French or colonial parents." During the 1830s the school was open to "all classes."<sup>83</sup> Rivalries between Protestant ministers and Catholic priests, who were often described as "Romish" or "Papist" priests by their rivals, resulted in the extension of educational facilities for non-white children. In 1827, for example, there were twenty-two schools in Port Louis, fourteen of which were for "coloured" children. In the district of Rivière du Rempart, there were three schools, two of which were for the "coloureds."<sup>84</sup>

The "liberal" ideas that the elite of the "Free Blacks" acquired at school combined with their improved economic position to heighten their sense of grievance. The ferment was deepened by the extension of the Order in Council of 1828, banning color bar in the British West Indies, to Mauritius in December 1829. The Order in Council was hailed as the charter of "coloured" rights and liberties, and was invoked again and again. The "coloureds" invoked it to protest the refusal of private schools to admit their children. A few examples will suffice. In a letter to Governor Nicolay dated June 15, 1839, Aristide Mangeot, a "coloured" proprietor and resident of Port Louis, complained that one Madame Yardin (the headteacher) refused to admit his daughter into her school. Mangeot said that the refusal was contrary to the Order in Council of 1829, "*Charte Sacrée pour toute la classe de Couleur*" (a sacred charter for the whole coloured class), and asked for the passage of a legislative measure to do away with all distinctions based on color.<sup>85</sup>

Jean Pierre Molliers, another "coloured" proprietor in the district of Grand Port, stated his grievance in a letter to Nicolay as



follows: In August 1838 Molliers learned that there were vacancies in a school in Port Louis, and applied to the school mistress for the admission of his three daughters. His application turned down, he applied to two other schools. Again, he was denied the admission he sought for his children. Finally, he asked for the intervention of the colonial government "to forbid the diffusion of principles so contrary to morality and religion and a system that could only breed disunion and discord between members of the same community." He was particularly resentful of the slight to the "coloureds" who, he said, formed two-thirds of the "sociable population" of Mauritius.<sup>86</sup> Finally, a memorial signed by twenty-three "coloured" proprietors of Port Louis asked Nicolay to grant them permission to bring four Sisters of Charity from Bourbon to take charge of the education of their children.<sup>87</sup>

Nicolay considered sympathetically the appeals of the "Free Blacks" for the desegregation of private schools, but he said that he was powerless to intervene on account of a recent Order in Council that removed the governor's control over private schools. Explaining the problem to his superior in the Colonial Office, he said: "So strong indeed are the prejudices of origin in the colonies where slavery existed, that I fear time alone can effect the reconciliation so much to be desired."<sup>88</sup> To the memorialists, J. L. Jaris and others, the reply was that England, and not time, was the best antidote for the problem of educating their children. "The governor regrets," the Colonial Secretary of Mauritius told them, "that he cannot comply with your request to sanction the admission of four Sisters of Charity from Bourbon as, in a recent despatch, the Secretary of State has objected to the education of the youth of the Colony, being entrusted to aliens, or to the introduction of Sisters of Charity for the purpose of teaching." Governor Nicolay "thinks that you should therefore lose no time," he added, "in sending to England for suitable instructors."<sup>89</sup> The memorialists' petition was thus declined on account of a newly adopted policy of stepped-up anglicization of Mauritius and its dependencies.

The leaders of the "Free Blacks" resented not only the exclusion of their children from the "lily-white" schools, but also their own lack of freedom for political participation and access to "high society." They used their organ, the *Balance*, to castigate the imperial elite and the Franco-Mauritians for the wrongs done them. One of the most vocal of the critics was A. V. Hitié (also spelled Hittie). Hitié was a teacher in one of the schools under Le Brun's management before he proceeded to England to study law with the support of funds subscribed by the "coloured" community.<sup>90</sup> While he was in England he wrote a long letter to the secretary of state for the colonies on July 29, 1835, complaining about the "frightful yoke" that oppressed his people, the "political subjection" under which they lived, and the "tyrannical system" that "weighed upon" the remainder of the King's faithful subjects in Mauritius. His other grievances were: the holding of the office of procureur-general by Prosper d'Epinay, a slave owner; the noninclusion of the "coloureds" as members of the Committee of Public Instruction and of the Council of Government; partial enforcement of the laws affecting the black apprentices; and noninvitation of distinguished "coloured" leaders to the Government House. Some of the "coloured" leaders that were not invited were Buttie of Grand Port and two police officers, Bissière and La Bonté. The former was described as one of the "great martyrs" for their loyalty to the King during the planter's rebellion in 1832. The latter two became police officers in 1833. The omission of their names from the list of those who attended the banquet given at the Government House in honor of the King's anniversary in 1834 was too much for Hitié to bear.<sup>91</sup>

Governor Nicolay considered Hitié and many "coloured" leaders as "agitators," who were hard to please and who took delight in writing ringing denunciations of, or, to use his expression, "violent declamations" against, the colonial government. His administration, it was said, had done better than Colville's in the matter of according social recognition to the "coloured" leaders

who "qualified" on the basis of education, wealth and "respectability." The government said that Buttie was invited to the banquet but that the invitation reached him too late for him to attend.<sup>92</sup>

From the foregoing, it is clear that the road to equality was still a rough one for the "coloureds." The more interesting point, however, is that the "coloured" spokesmen rarely considered that the privileges they sought for themselves as members of the "sociable population," to use the words of Molliers, should be extended to those whom they ranked below them. While the whites held on to their dominion over the "inferior" classes, and the leaders of the "coloureds" clamored for full civic equality with whites, the downtrodden slaves longed for the day when freedom would be restored to them and when they would be free from the bossism of whites and "fair-skinned" blacks alike.

### Notes

1. P.P. XLVI, 733 (1831-32), p. 395; Michael Craton, *Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British Slavery* (New York, 1974), pp. 272-73.
2. Bathurst to Cole, May 28, 1823, C.O. 415/4.
3. P.P. XXVI, 526 (1828), pp. 32-33.
4. P.P. XXV, 333 (1829), p. 93.
5. P.P. XXVI, 526 (1828), pp. 27-28.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., pp. 30-31.
9. Ibid.
10. P.P. XV, 262 (1830-31), pp. 7-8.
11. P.P. XXV, 333 (1829), p. 101.
12. P.P. XV, 262, (1830-31), p. 53.
13. P.P. XXVII (1828), p. 275.
14. Ibid., pp. 276-77.
15. Ibid.
16. P.P. XXV, 204 (1828), pp. 60-72, passim.
17. Great Britain, *Copy of the Ordinance for the Government and Protection of Slaves in the Mauritius*, P.P. XXV, 338, (1829), p. 23.
18. P.P. XXVII (1828), pp. 370-73.
19. The materials in this section of the chapter are contained in *ibid.*, pp. 327-57.



20. Ibid., pp. 368-69.
21. P.P. XXV, 333 (1829) pp. 98-99.
22. Murray to Colville, January 3, 1829, *ibid.*, p. 100.
23. Colebrooke and Blair to Hay, September 9, 1828, C.O. 167/118.
24. A Memorandum on the Despatch from the Governor of Mauritius with the Protector's Report from 20th March to 24th June 1829, September 5, 1830, C.O. 172/27.
25. P.P. XV, 262 (1830-31) pp. 4-8.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 58.
31. Ibid., pp. 84-96.
32. Ibid., pp. 103 and 109.
33. Ibid., pp. 108, 204-10.
34. Goderich to Colville, April 17, 1831, in *ibid.*, pp. 219-28.
35. P.P. XV, 262 (1830-31), pp. 302-09.
36. Ibid., p. 105.
37. Protector of Slaves' Report, C.O. 172/28.
38. Ibid.
39. P.P. XV, 262 (1830-31), pp. 329-30.
40. Ibid.
41. The materials in this section of the chapter are derived from Great Britain, *An Order of the King in Council for Consolidating the Several Laws Recently Made for Improving the Condition of Slaves in His Majesty's Colonies of Trinidad, Barbice, Demerara, St. Lucia, The Cape of Good Hope and Mauritius*, P.P. XXXIII (1830), pp. 1-17.
42. Toussaint, *Histoire des Iles Mascareignes*, pp. 200-01.
43. P.P. XLVI, 733 (1831-32), pp. 382-83.
44. Report of the Protector of Slaves for the Period January 1 to June 30, 1830, C.O. 172/28.
45. Report of the Protector of Slaves for the Period June 30-December 31, 1831, C.O. 172/29.
46. Ibid.
47. A Colonial Memorandum, dated May 3, 1832, on the Report of the Protector of Slaves for the Half Year Ending in June 1831, C.O. 172/28.
48. Report of the Protector of Slaves for the Period June 30-December 31, 1831, C.O. 172/29.
49. Thomas to the Chief Secretary to the Mauritius Government, February 18, 1832, C.O. 172/30.
50. Report of the Protector of Slaves for the Period January-June, 1832, in *ibid.*
51. Pridham, *England's Colonial Empire*, pp. 135-36.
52. John Jeremie, *Recent Events at Mauritius* (Westport, Conn., 1970), pp. 43-44, 49-50 and 55-57.

53. Mauritius, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Council of Government, July 7, 1832, C.O. 172/6.
54. Minutes of the Proceedings of the Council of Government, July 9, 1832, in *ibid.*
55. Quoted in Jeremie, *Recent Events*, p. 73.
56. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 72.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75, 84.
58. Minutes of the Proceedings of the Council of Government, February 4, 1833, C.O. 170/6.
59. Jeremie, *Recent Events*, pp. 124-240, *passim*.
60. S. B. De Burgh-Edwards, *The History of Mauritius, 1507-1914* (London, 1921), pp. 70-71.
61. Minutes of the Proceedings of the Council of Government, September 8, 1834, C.O. 170/7.
62. Reports of the Protector of Slaves for the Year 1832, C.O. 172/30 and 31.
63. The Protector of Slaves to the Colonial Secretary of Mauritius, August 16, 1832, C.O. 172/31.
64. Report of the Protector of Slaves for the Period July-December 1832, in *ibid.*
65. Report of the Protector of Slaves for the Period January-June 1833, C.O. 172/32.
66. Report of the Protector of Slaves for the Period July-December 1833, C.O. 172/33.
67. *Ibid.*
68. Reports of the Protector of Slaves for the Period January 1, 1834, to February 1, 1835, C.O. 172/34-36.
69. "Jottings from the Early Annals of the Seychellois Police Force," *The Seychelles Annual*, no. 5 (1964), pp. 37-40.
70. Report of the Protector of Slaves for the Period July 1, 1834, to February 1, 1835, C.O. 172/36.
71. C.O. 415/18.
72. Mauritius, First Report of the Education Committee for the Year 1843, C.O. 170/18; Barnwell and Toussaint, *A Short History of Mauritius*, p. 113.
73. Cole to Colebrooke and Blair, July 24, 1827, C.O. 415/19; Commissioners of Colonial Audit to the British Treasury, December 23, 1816, C.O. 415/13.
74. Mauritius, Secretary of the Committee of Public Instructions to the Colonial Secretary of Mauritius, December 19, 1839, C.O. 170/14; enclosure in Nicolay to Glenelg, October 3, 1836, C.O. 167/191.
75. Patrick Beaton, *Creoles and Coolies* (London, 1859), pp. 101-1.
76. Nicolay to Glenelg, August 27, 1836, C.O. 167/190.
77. London Missionary Society Register of Missionaries, Council for World Mission, London.
78. A Chronological Review of London Missionary Society Mission in Mauritius, Box 1, Folder 3, Jacket B (Archives of the Council for World Mission at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London).
79. Le Brun to Reverend Burden, March 30, 1815, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket A; Le Brun to Burden, July 29, 1816, and Farquhar to Burden, May 20, 1816, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket B; Le Brun to Burden, January 7, 1817, Box 1, Folder 1, Jacket A.

80. Le Brun to G. F. Dick, Colonial Secretary of Mauritius, May 25, 1837, C.O. 170/9.
81. Le Brun to Burden, January 7, 1822 and January 16, 1823, Box 1, Folder 2, Jacket B; Le Brun to Colebrooke and Blair, January, 1827, C.O. 415/15.
82. Review of L.M.S. Mission in Mauritius, Box 1, Folder 3, Jacket B.
83. Jenkins to Colebrooke and Blair, November 8, 1827, C.O. 415/15; Nicolay to Glenelg, October 6, 1836, C.O. 167/191.
84. D'Unienville to Colebrooke and Blair, October 26, 1827, C.O. 415/15.
85. Enclosure in Nicolay to Lord Russell, February 13, 1840, C.O. 167/217.
86. Molliers to Nicolay, July 1, 1839, enclosed in *ibid*.
87. J. L. Jaris and others to Nicolay, February 13, 1840, in *ibid*.
88. Nicolay to Russell, February 13, 1840, in *ibid*.
89. Enclosure in *ibid*.
90. Nicolay to Glenelg, October 3, 1836, C.O. 167/191.
91. Enclosure in Nicolay to Glenelg, October 3, 1836, Glenelg to Nicolay, March 18, 1837, in *ibid*.
92. *Ibid*.



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### **The “Apprenticeship” System, 1835-39**

In the summer of 1833 the British Parliament passed into law a bill with an intriguing title, namely, “An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies, for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves, and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves.”<sup>1</sup> Except for the last portion of the title, the act, sometimes called the Emancipation Act, is a misnomer. Purportedly abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire, it applied only to some colonies, such as the British West Indies and Mauritius and its dependencies. Parts of the British Empire, such as the “protected” states in the northwestern portion of the Indian subcontinent, were not covered by the act. In those “protected” states, the “legal status” of slavery was not abolished until 1843, and the institution of slavery itself lasted for many decades thereafter before it was officially discarded. Much later, in Zanzibar and in some other parts of Britain’s colonial holdings in Africa, the emancipation of slaves lagged behind the abolition of the “legal status” of slavery. In the colonies where the Abolition Act of 1833 did apply, only slaves under six years of age at the time that the act came into force, and children born to slaves thereafter, were declared free. The slaves above six years of age were said to be free, but were required to work for their “former” masters as “apprentices” for a limited period: the agricultural slaves, also known as *praedials*, were to work for six years, while the non-*praedials* were to work for four years.

According to the framers of the act, the “apprenticeship” sys-

**Table 3<sup>2</sup>**

<b>1. Praedials Attached to Plantations</b>	
Head People	723
Tradesmen	873
Inferior (Junior) Tradesmen	1,300
Field Laborers	15,617
Inferior Field Laborers	6,669
Total:	25,182
<b>2. Praedials Unattached to Plantations</b>	
Head People	161
Tradesmen	266
Inferior Tradesmen	525
Field Laborers	4,406
Inferior Field Laborers	1,667
Total:	7,025
<b>3. Nonpraedials</b>	
Head Tradesmen	1,107
Inferior Head Tradesmen	2,130
Head People Employed on Wharfs, Shipping, etc.	80
Inferior People Employed on Wharfs, Shipping, etc.	849
Head Domestic Servants	6,749
Inferior Domestic Servants	8,807
Total:	19,722
Grand Total:	51,929

tem was designed to promote the industry of the "manumitted" slaves and to compensate the owners of the slaves for the loss that they suffered as a result of the manumission. The slave owners were entitled to share the twenty million pounds sterling voted by the British Parliament as extra compensation. A closer look at what actually happened suggests, however, that the Abolition Act of 1833 abolished chattel slavery, but that it endorsed serfdom in its place. As we shall see below, the law declared the slaves "personally" free, that is, they could no longer be bought and sold individually, but they were tied to the land, or to the services they

rendered, and could be bought and sold as integral parts of the land. Moreover, the act did not promote the industry of the "manumitted" slaves; rather, it insured that the "customary" labor performed by the chattel slaves was now rendered by the serfs for their prospective manumission.

The act came into force in the British West Indies in August 1834, and in Mauritius and its dependencies on February 1, 1835. On the latter date there were 62,022 slaves in Mauritius. Of this number 1,009 were under six years of age and were, therefore, not legally subject to the "apprenticeship" system. The aged and infirm slaves numbered 9,084. Because of their condition they were "inoperative" or "dead weight" "apprentices," to borrow expressions in use at that time. The effective ones numbered 51,929 and are shown in Table 3.

Figures are not available for the Seychelles, but there were over 5,000 slaves there in 1830 and about the same number of "apprentices" in the mid-1830s.<sup>3</sup> In both places, however, the "apprenticeship" system was governed by the same rules and regulations, and the attitudes of the slave owners toward the slaves were similar.

### **Legal Framework**

The "apprenticeship" system in Mauritius and its dependencies was regulated by the Order in Council of September 17, 1834.<sup>4</sup> The Order in Council detailed the duties of the "apprentices" and the obligations of their masters, and prescribed penalties for failure to fulfil them. The *praedials* were required to work for their masters without pay for a total of seven-and-a-half hours a day, forty-five hours a week. Sundays and holidays were not counted as working days and were to be observed as days of rest. Non-*praedials* worked without pay and for the same length of time as the *praedials*, but the domestics sometimes worked longer hours because of the nature of their employment. In return for their work



the praedials received food rations or provision grounds. The "apprentices" who were fed in the latter way were entitled to spend not less than four and a half hours and not more than seven and a half hours a week in cultivating the provision ground for their benefit. They were entitled to the food they raised on the land, but the land itself remained the property of their masters. The domestic servants were given food rations. Other nonpraedial workers were treated in the same way as domestics, being entitled to food in return for the chores they performed for the benefit of their masters. The masters were required to issue clothing once a year to their "apprentices" above five years of age. A master with forty or more "apprentices" was required to hire a medical practitioner to look after their health. The "emancipation" law made provision for them to purchase their release from their compulsory duties at prices determined by evaluation. This concession was designed to encourage them to work more "industriously" by letting out their services for pay in their leisure hours.

The Order in Council imposed heavy penalties on those who did not do their duties or did them poorly. For every hour that an "apprentice" was absent from work without acceptable reason, he was required to render additional service to his master, up to a maximum of fifteen hours a week. An "apprentice" was to be regarded as a "deserter" if he absented himself from work without reasonable excuse for more than seven and a half hours a week; as a "vagabond," if his absence was more than two days a week; and as a "runaway," if he was absent for more than six days a week. "Deserters" were to be sentenced to imprisonment at hard labor for a period not exceeding one week. Conviction for "vagabondage" carried with it imprisonment for a period not exceeding two weeks and up to fifteen strokes of the cane. A "runaway" was to be sent to jail for a period not exceeding one month and to be given up to thirty lashes.

Conviction for "indolent," "careless" or "negligent" performance of duties by an "apprentice" was punished by the exaction of extra services; in this case, the master was entitled to

make the culprit work up to fifteen hours a week. If the convicted "apprentice" was an agricultural worker, he was to be given up to fifteen lashes in addition. For a second offense committed within two months of the first one, he was to be imprisoned at hard labor for a period not exceeding one week. For a third or subsequent offense committed within two months of the first one, he was to be confined at hard labor for a period not exceeding two weeks; in addition, he received up to twenty strokes.

"Combinations" among "apprentices" were not tolerated. If three or more of them agreed to resist or actually resisted the "lawful commands" of their master, they became guilty of "unlawful conspiracy." The "conspirators" were subject to jail sentences at hard labor for a period not exceeding six months. If they were males they could also receive up to thirty-nine strokes of the cane. If they were females they were confined in the stocks during daylight hours in lieu of corporal punishment. Three or more "apprentices" engaging in a "riot" or "tumultuous assembly" and refusing to disperse within ten minutes after they had been ordered to do so by a justice of the peace were liable to serve jail sentences at hard labor for a period up to twelve months. An "apprentice" who left or attempted to leave the colony without a passport issued by the governor was liable to imprisonment at hard labor for a term not exceeding six months. No passport could be issued without the written consent of the master of the "apprentice." These restrictions were designed to prevent an "apprentice" from undercutting the "apprenticeship" system by escaping into freedom.

Compared to the penalties imposed on the "apprentices," the masters suffered only slight punishments for not fulfilling their obligations toward their "apprentices." Apart from the requirement to feed and house them and give them clothes once a year, the obligations of the masters became binding only when they were assumed. The most important "permissive" obligations involved paying "apprentices" for contracted taskwork or extra services rendered during their leisure hours. A master could be ordered by a judge or magistrate to pay his "apprentices" the sums due them for



such services. Other obligations were of the "cease and desist" nature. A master was forbidden to prolong the weekly services of his "apprentices" by coercive means, and he was not permitted to punish them as he did in the "old" days of slavery. A master who did not discharge his required, "permissive," and "cease and desist" obligations was dealt with in a manner that befitted his free and superior status. There was no question of imprisoning or flogging him for his breach of the obligations. If he fraudulently or forcefully prolonged the weekly services of his praedial workers, he was required, on conviction, to pay each worker one shilling for every hour that the latter worked in excess of the stipulated number of hours. If he did not pay the compensations due to the "apprentices" for extra services rendered to him in their spare time within one week after a judge had ordered him to do so, the judge could order the attachment of the produce, utensils, or some other property on the master's estate or plantation. A judge could also impose up to five pounds' fine on a master or his authorized agent for flogging and imprisoning his "apprentices," for putting them in the stocks, and for other forms of maltreatment.

Lastly, the Order in Council provided for the administration of the "apprenticeship" system. Convinced by past experience that local magistrates with slaves or interests in slavery could not be relied on to administer the law impartially, the British government decreed that the law should be administered by special magistrates or judges, appointed and paid by the British government. The districts of Mauritius were accordingly subdivided to make the administration of the law easier, and a special magistrate was appointed to each of them. Altogether, there were sixteen special magistrates. The whole of the Seychelles archipelago was placed under a special magistrate.

### **The System in Practice**

The working of the "apprenticeship" system was affected by



the interaction of a number of factors. Besides the legal framework provided by the Order in Council of September 1834, there were such variables as the differing needs, temperament and attitudes of the major participants in the system, namely, the proprietary class, the "apprentice" class and the special magistrates. The proprietary class was not a homogenous group. It included whites (mostly of French extraction, and a sprinkling of Britons) and nonwhites, planters and nonplanters, persons with scores of "manumitted" slaves, and those with only a few "manumitted" slaves. Their interests and attitudes varied, but they shared some common concerns. They were all keenly interested in exacting as much labor as possible from the "apprentices" and in keeping them in their "proper" place. Since most of the "apprentices" were employed in agriculture or in agriculturally based industries, the demand for labor by the plantocrats may be taken as the most important single factor affecting the working of the "apprenticeship" system. I shall discuss the role of the demand for labor before discussing the role of the other factors.

The planters tried varied methods to increase the output of labor. One method was the employment of "apprentices" on Saturdays. Some planters behaved as did one planter in the Black River district. This employer threatened to deny his workers the privilege of gathering fruits and vegetables from his estates unless they agreed to work for him on Saturdays. Also, he threatened to deny them the privilege of keeping pigs and poultry on his plantations and to order them to sell those that they already had. Some planters were less threatening; they used more persuasive techniques to get their "apprentices" to work for them on Saturdays, in return for which the "apprentices" received graded scales of wages according to their abilities.<sup>5</sup> Some of the planters who did not demand Saturday labor worked their "apprentices" three hours beyond the working hours imposed by law.<sup>6</sup> Another device used to increase labor output was piecework. By 1838 only Port Louis district and the first section of Pamplemousses did not require piecework. In the other districts the number of estates adopting the piecework

method varied from four in the second section of Black River to thirty-one in the first section of Rivière du Rempart.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, owing to the decline in the cotton and coffee cultivation in the Seychelles, the "apprentices" who were not gainfully employed there were exported to Mauritius.

The methods that the planters used to insure the flow of labor were also varied. The old technique of slave smuggling was resorted to when practicable, but the yield was uncertain and precarious. Another method was to conserve the working force by preventing the escape of the "apprentices." An ordinance was passed on October 12, 1835 (Ordinance No. 14 of 1835), that declared that concealing maroons or aiding them in their escape was an infraction of the police law, punishable as "offences against the said law, according to the circumstances of the case."<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately for the planters, the ordinance did not receive the approval of the British government. Coercive legislation was also used in another way. This time it was designed to mobilize the "inferior" free creole workers and immigrant laborers in the interest of sugar and related industries. Two pieces of legislation were passed on November 14, 1835, for this purpose: one (Ordinance No. 16) governed laborers and "workmen"; the other (Ordinance No. 17) regulated domestic service.

As the preamble states, Ordinance No. 16 of 1835 had a dual aim: first, to combat the "natural inclination to idleness and sloth" of persons just emerging from a state of servitude to one of freedom; second, to remedy the insufficiency of the existing laws to compel the lower classes of society to work in the interest of agriculture and industry, and to protect the respective interests of masters and servants. The ordinance provided for a general census of all inhabitants of Mauritius, except those subject to the so-called Emancipation Act of 1833, to be taken before January 1, 1836. All those who came within the purview of the act were required to declare to the census officers their names, ages, places of birth, last places of residence, and occupations; failure to submit the required data was punishable by a fine not exceeding two pounds sterling.



The census would be verified at the end of each year and would include changes that took place during the preceding year.<sup>9</sup>

Unemployment was equated with "vagrancy" and "vagabondage" and was punished as such. All adult, able-bodied persons without employment or "recognized" means of subsistence were placed under the supervision of the police of the district in which they lived. If they broke police regulations, they were subject to imprisonment for a period not exceeding three months for the first offense, and for one year for a repetition of the offense. All unemployed, able-bodied persons under sixty years of age and "without sufficient means of subsistence" were required to find work within a stipulated time. If they failed to secure jobs, the state was entitled to employ them on public works for its own benefit. If they failed, while working for the state, to find employment within three months, they were liable to be sentenced to work on the plantations or in manufacturing establishments for a period not exceeding three years. The lower courts were given jurisdiction over cases appealed within eight days of sentencing, and their decisions were final. If a person serving the three-year labor sentence was not able to secure a job by the end of that period, he was to be subjected to "a new engagement in the same manner as before."

Ordinance No. 16 of 1835 required all persons over twenty-one years of age who were employed (or who wanted to hire themselves out as workers or as apprentices) for a period exceeding one month to register their names on official registers kept either in the registry office at Port Louis or in the district registry offices. A person who failed to register his name had to pay a fine not exceeding one pound sterling or to go to jail for a period not exceeding three days. Persons who registered their names were to be given "tickets" or "employment books" showing their names, places of birth, occupations and marital status. The "tickets" were to be renewed each time that the holders changed their masters; if they failed to renew the "tickets" they could be jailed for as long as eight days. An employer hiring workers without "tickets" was



liable, on conviction, to pay a fine not exceeding ten pounds.

The search for a steady supply of labor was not limited to the coercion of adult workers. Children were also to be "encouraged" to acquire skills or develop industrious habits. Children above the age of eight and "young adults" (children between fourteen and twenty-one years of age) could, with the consent of their parents or guardians, be apprenticed to learn a trade or to work as laborers. The same class of children could, of their own free will, if their parents or guardians did not oppose it, apprentice themselves or hire their services out as laborers. Engagements of the nature described here were to be in writing and were to be concluded before the justice of the peace in Port Louis or the civil commissaries of the districts. The young apprentices or workers were to be issued work "tickets." Children and "young adults" from indigent families that could not maintain them could also be apprenticed or engaged as workers under the supervision of the officials designated above. Apprentices under the age of fourteen could be confined (imprisoned) for twenty-four hours or flogged by their masters for not doing their duties. "Young adults" who failed to discharge their duties as apprentices or workers, did their work poorly, or absented themselves from their work could be sentenced to fines not exceeding five pounds or to jail terms not exceeding three months. In addition, the offenders were bound by "the special conditions" laid down in their indentures or contracts.

All lower-class workers were not only to be taught the importance of working for a living, but also to be "helped" to develop "proper" conduct befitting their status. Accordingly, any laborer, artisan, or apprentice who "menaced" or struck his master or his master's agent was to be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding twelve months. Also, if three or more workers or apprentices "conspired" to quit or neglect their work, change their conditions of service, or secure an increase in wages, they could be sentenced to imprisonment for a period as long as six months.

In contrast to the severe penalties imposed on the workers and apprentices for various categories of offenses, the master-employ-

ers suffered only minor punishments for not fulfilling their obligations. A few examples will suffice to show the weighting of the law heavily in their favor. A master who failed to fulfill the terms of contract signed with a worker or an apprentice could be compelled, "at the suit of the labourer, workman or apprentice," to pay such damages to the plaintiff as the court might award. For maltreating or excessively punishing his workers and apprentices, a master could be sentenced to pay to the injured party such damages as the court might award, and to a fine not exceeding ten pounds.

Lastly, Ordinance No. 16 of 1835 laid down regulations to govern the recruitment and employment of foreign laborers. Some of the regulations seemed to be unobjectionable. For example, before an employer could bring indentured workers into the colony, he had to obtain the governor's permission. Failure to do so was punishable by a fine of £100. Also, the contracts signed by the employer and the workers had to be registered in Mauritius before they would take effect. The discrimination comes in the different allocation of obligations and the awarding of penalties for the nonfulfilment of obligations. For example, an employer who did not pay his indentured workers the wages due them had to be sued by the workers for compensation. On the other hand, an indentured worker who absented himself from work was required to render to his employer the equivalent of two days' work for every day that he was absent. If the absence exceeded three days, the worker could be jailed for a period not exceeding five days. If the worker was imprisoned for an offense, his employer was entitled to deduct the value of two days' work for each day of imprisonment. The "double cut" was later applied in the punishment of indentured workers for ordinary absences from work. The workers could also be punished for "conspiracies." In this and in some other ways, the treatment of immigrant workers was similar to the treatment given the creole workers.

Ordinance No. 17 of 1835 imposed obligations as severe as those imposed by Ordinance No. 16 of the same year. Unlike the latter, which was designed for "regular" workers and "field



hands," the former was designed to regulate the employment of domestics and day-laborers. Domestics not governed by the Abolition Act of 1833 were required to register their names at the police office in Port Louis or at the offices of the district civil commissaries. If they failed to do so they could be imprisoned for a period not exceeding three days. They were required to carry work "tickets." On leaving an employer, a domestic servant had to report to the police within three days. His "ticket" was to be forwarded to the police by his employer, who was required to endorse in the "ticket" the day the domestic servant left and explain the cause of leaving his service. When the domestic reported to the police, he had to explain the type of work he intended to do subsequently. Failure to report to the police was punishable by imprisonment for a period not exceeding four days. A domestic servant dismissed by his master was not to be hired by another employer until the "ticket" of the employee had been inspected by the police. An employer who did not comply with this provision could be fined as much as five pounds. A domestic servant out of service for more than three months had to prove that he could support himself; if his means of subsistence were not "recognized," he could be employed on the public works for the benefit of the state. The "jobmen" were governed by the same rules and treated in the same manner as the domestic servants. The domestics and "jobmen" of Port Louis were required to wear badges and to occupy a stand when out of work; failure to comply with this provision was a punishable offense. Employers could be fined for hiring workers without badges. Cases arising as a result of the infringement of the ordinance were to be tried by the justice of the peace at Port Louis and the civil commissaries of the districts.<sup>10</sup>

The two ordinances were put into operation until the pleasure of the British Crown could be ascertained. Unfortunately for the proprietors, the Crown disallowed the ordinances. In a despatch to Governor Nicolay, dated May 25, 1836, Lord Glenelg stated that Ordinance No. 16 of 1835 was not approved because it amounted to "a compulsory system, scarcely less rigid, and in some respects



even less equitable, than that of slavery itself." Similarly, Ordinance No. 17 was disallowed because it imposed restrictions "of an irksome, invidious, and painful kind, which must greatly impede the free demand for employment and the free supply of labour."<sup>11</sup>

The disallowance disappointed Nicolay and the employers of labor. On July 25, 1836, Nicolay wrote a despatch to Glenelg, pointing out that the restraints imposed by the ordinances on workers "are not in general" as heavy as the restraints imposed by special laws regulating the relations between masters and servants in other places. He said that the regulations contained in the ordinance had "already produced a good practical effect, without any manifestation of discontent, or complaint of oppression."<sup>12</sup> Six months later he wrote that the disallowance had excited among the "inhabitants at large" (i.e., the planters), "a considerable degree of alarm." Planters in two districts had asked the governor for a permit to hold public meetings to draw up petitions protesting against the disallowances, and more requests to hold such meetings would have followed had the governor not refused to sanction any public meeting for the purpose indicated. Finally, he said that there had been, since the news of the disallowances became public, "a visible increase of idleness and disorder among the lower classes of the community."<sup>13</sup>

Other reactions took the form of the suggestion of ingenious plans for inducing the "habits of industry" in the lower classes. Adrien d'Epinay proposed to exchange the remaining period of his "former" slaves' "apprenticeship" for labor contracts similar to those entered with the Indians. Nicolay thought that the plan was "a very desirable arrangement . . . ."<sup>14</sup> Glenelg refused to buy the idea, however. He informed Nicolay that the "groundwork" of the d'Epinay plan had been taken away by the Crown's disallowance of Ordinance No. 16 of 1835. If the plan had been carried out, its effects, he added, "would apparently have been little else than to continue the existing apprenticeship under a new name, though exempt from the obligations on the part of the employer and the

authority of the Special Magistrate which are incidental to the condition under the Act of Parliament for the Abolition of Slavery.''<sup>15</sup>

Another plan was suggested by Special Magistrate C. Anderson of Port Louis district. Anderson regretted the royal disallowance of the ordinances, which, he said, had deprived Mauritius of the means of converting "idle" and "profligate" blacks into industrious colonial subjects. His plan, which was by no means a new one, involved settling selected "Free Blacks" in labor villages, located in close proximity to the plantations. In exchange for some land on which they would build their huts and grow their food, the "agricultural colonists" would bind themselves "to give their labor" to the neighboring proprietors.<sup>16</sup> The Anderson settlement scheme was not adopted because it was thought that it would promote subsistence labor at the expense of capitalist labor. As Nicolay explained the situation, most of the "Free Blacks" were content to work just enough to earn their own food. If they were given ample land to cultivate enough food for themselves, there was no guarantee that they would "give their labour," to use Anderson's expression, to the planters. What was needed was a scheme of "extending agricultural labour throughout the colony . . . ."<sup>17</sup> What Nicolay preferred was a scheme that would insure an adequate supply of workers who would lay greater stress on labor for profit rather than on leisure. In the eyes of the officials and the labor-hungry planters, the enjoyment of long hours or weeks of leisure by lower-class persons amounted to "idleness." Unable to force their work ethic on the "recalcitrant" free blacks, the planters tried to squeeze out as much labor as possible from the black "apprentices."

The "apprentices'" evaluation of the "apprenticeship" system and their responses to that evaluation affected the working of the system. To the "manumitted" slaves the system was a disguise for continued slavery. Apart from the limitation placed upon the number of hours they had to work for their "former" owners, they did not gain much from the "apprenticeship" system. It is true that



they were paid for overtime work, but the rates of remuneration were generally lower than those paid to the free creole laborers. Moreover, some "apprentices" who asked for short-term absence from work in order to visit an ailing relative or for other reasons found that the cost per hour of absence was more than the rate of pay for overtime work.<sup>18</sup> In many other respects, the "apprentices" did not see any significant change in their status. As slaves they were bought and sold as chattels; as "apprentices" they were "personally" free but were bought and sold as integral parts of the landed estates. As slaves they were flogged on the orders of their masters or the duly accredited deputies of their masters for offenses detailed or unspecified by the slave laws; as "apprentices" they received for diverse offenses punishments (including flogging) ordered by the special magistrates. As slaves they could, if they had the means, purchase their freedom; as "apprentices" those who could afford the payments purchased their freedom from compulsory labor at "enormous prices," as one resident Briton put it, "as if no act of emancipation existed."<sup>19</sup>

Although the "apprentices" shared a common evaluation of the "apprenticeship" system, they responded to it differently. Some of them worked very hard in their spare time to accumulate enough money to buy their freedom. In the district of Grand Port, for example, 138 "apprentices" paid £1,736 8s. for their freedom during the period April 1, 1837, to February 1, 1839. In the same period, 221 "apprentices" were freed "gratuitously." In the district of Rivière du Rempart, 559 "apprentices" were liberated by purchase and by the "benevolence" of their masters between March 1836 and February 1839.<sup>20</sup> In the colony as a whole, over 3,500 "apprentices" were said to have been freed between February 1, 1835, and November 1838.<sup>21</sup> Another estimate states that some 9,000 "apprentices" were manumitted by the end of the "apprenticeship" period.<sup>22</sup> Intoxicated by the newly found freedom, some of those who had purchased their freedom tended to look down upon those who could not afford to do so. It is said that the former would come to the latter to show off their shoes—for



neither the slaves nor the "apprentices" were allowed to wear shoes—as marks of their free status!<sup>23</sup> Those who could not afford to buy their freedom were greatly disappointed and bided their time.

The "apprentices" as a whole discharged their duties and behaved generally in two ways. Some of them worked as best as they could, occasionally receiving commendation for good behavior and jobs well done, and scolding or punishment for their transgressions. Many rarely complained to the special magistrates about the wrongs that their masters did them. They failed to complain, not because the special magistrates were inaccessible—in fact, some of the magistrates did their best to protect them from grave ill-treatment—but because they feared that they might not receive justice at the hands of the very men with whom their masters socialized in the rural isolated districts. As some of them put it, complaining about their grievances to the special magistrates might worsen their situations and those of their children. Moreover, in a few years they would be free.<sup>24</sup> The other category of "apprentices" discounted silent suffering and submissiveness in favor of militancy. They did not think that they should sustain the comfort of their masters by careful and diligent work. Their chief weapons for fighting the renovated slavery to which they were subjected were similar to those they had employed during the days of "amelioration," namely, drunkenness (real or feigned), insubordination, stealing, mutilation of farm animals, destruction or "disrepair" of farm implements, lateness for work and marooning. For these offenses the occasional and the habitual offenders drew upon themselves the anger of their masters and the penal sanctions imposed by the special magistrates.

The judicial decisions and the attitudes of the special magistrates constituted the third major factor affecting the working of the so-called apprenticeship system. "By their exactions," as Anderson admitted, "the apprentice is compelled to perform the work to which his employer is entitled, and in all well regulated estates it will be admitted that the work now obtained by the planter is at

least as great as it was during the existence of slavery.”<sup>25</sup> This compulsion made it difficult for the special magistrates to win the confidence of the “apprentices,” for the latter saw the former as upholders of the status quo. On the other hand, it was the duty of the special magistrates to see that the masters fulfilled their obligations toward the “manumitted” slaves. Carrying out this aspect of their duties was not an easy task, as some of them learned. The case of Special Magistrate J. I. Minchin may be taken to illustrate some of the pressures to which the magistrates were subjected.

Minchin served as special magistrate in the Black River district from March 1835 to June 1836. In June 1836 Colomb d’Ecotay, a planter with whom Minchin had formerly been on intimate terms, complained to Governor Nicolay that “from the manner in which Special Justice Minchin had interfered with his apprentices, they had been thrown into a state of insubordination,” which on one occasion endangered the lives of his family. D’Ecotay also complained that Minchin had seduced one of his female “apprentices,” who was about to be freed, to live with Minchin as his mistress. In his defense Minchin stated that d’Ecotay had actually been paid £300 for the emancipation of the female “apprentice.” He attributed the charge that he had incited the “apprentices” into “insubordination” and “menacing” conduct to d’Ecotay’s resentment of his attempts to protect the “apprentices,” and to the fact that d’Ecotay had been convicted in a police court for cruelty to his slaves.<sup>26</sup> Nicolay appointed Special Magistrates C. Anderson and R. M. Thomas to investigate and report on d’Ecotay’s charges.

On July 4, 1836, the two magistrates reported their findings. The evidence they uncovered convinced them that d’Ecotay had been “most culpably negligent of his duty” toward the “apprentices” “in every way”; in particular, they drew attention to the “ruinous state” of the huts that housed the workers, to the lack of “proper medical attendance” and “the necessary accommodation” for the sick. These conditions, the magistrates believed, had combined with “the violent and unjust severity” of d’Ecotay “in



several individual cases" to create "a feeling of aversion and distrust" on the part of the workers, which "only time and better treatment can remove." Anderson and Thomas found no evidence of the alleged riotous and threatening conduct on the part of the "apprentices"; rather, they were impressed by "the calmness and patience with which the apprentices had long endured acts of violence, oppression and injustice."<sup>27</sup> The report cleared Minchin of the first part of the charges, but the second charge was not easily forgiven for being extramagisterial in nature! Unfortunately for him, it was also revealed that he had cheated on his allowance for house rent. He was therefore relieved of his post.<sup>28</sup>

From what has been said above, it would appear that Minchin deserved the punishment that he received. There is reason, however, to believe that his indiscreet acts would not have come to light as readily as they did if he had toed the planters' line. This suggestion is supported by the following observation made by James Blackhouse, a British missionary working in Mauritius at that time:

It is said that those who have been removed from the office [of special magistrate], have universally been those who filled it the most efficiently, in the performance of their duty as the protectors of the Apprentices: though it might be too much to suppose that their moral characters were clear in the points charged against them; yet, when similar instances of delinquency are notoriously known to exist in others, who lean to the Planters, and are suffered to pass unnoticed, the general feeling of the Colony on the subject appears unequivocal.<sup>29</sup>

Faced with situations similar to those in which Minchin found himself, the special magistrates thought twice before incurring the enmity of the planters by overzealously protecting the "apprentices" from abuse.

For reasons that will be explained below, the special magistrates adopted a tough posture toward the "apprentices." Minchin himself, for all his zeal in protecting the "apprentices" of d'Ecotay, did not hesitate in imposing on those who offended punishments exactly as they were prescribed. A few examples from his journal



will illustrate this point. On March 30, 1835, he decided the case brought against one Lafleur, the "apprentice" of one Boucherville, by the overseer of the latter. Lafleur was absent from his duties from March 6 to 14. For this offense he was sentenced to work on the public roads, to imprisonment for one month, and to receive thirty lashes. Because of his emaciated and weak condition, the corporal punishment was deferred, but he served the other parts of the sentence. One Horace, an "apprentice" of one Labutte, was absent from work from March 30 to April 4. On April 15 Minchin sentenced him to receive twenty-five lashes, to one month of extra labor for the benefit of his master, and to be put in the "Bloc" at night for the same period. Another case involved a female "apprentice" name Meline. Her master, one Monsieur Trichot, charged her with having "exposed" his property carelessly. On April 20 Minchin sentenced her to one month of extra labor for the benefit of her master and to be put in the "Bloc" for the same period. Finally, on January 21, 1836, Minchin sentenced an "apprentice" belonging to a proprietor named Beguinot to one month's imprisonment "in the Bloc with hard labor" and to receive twenty lashes. The offense for which the "apprentice" was punished was described as "refusing to obey the orders of his master and insolence."<sup>30</sup>

The other magistrates behaved very much like Minchin in the awarding of punishments to the "manumitted" slaves, and flogging occurred frequently in the punishments. For example, Special Magistrate Edward Kelly of the district of Pamplemousses reported on September 20, 1837, that he had awarded an average of 115 punishments per month during the period February 1, 1836, to February 1, 1837, to an "apprentice" population of 6,235. Of the total number, 110 were of a corporal nature. Between February 1 and September 1, 1837, the average number of punishments per month declined to seventy-two, but thirty of them, that is almost half, were of a corporal nature.<sup>31</sup>

The relatively high incidence of the punishments given to the "apprentices" aroused the concern of Lord Glenelg. In a dispatch to Governor Nicolay, he asked Nicolay to call the attention of the

special magistrates to the frequency of punishments in general and particularly to those of a corporal nature, "which are stated to be far beyond the proportion in the West Indies of a nearly similar extent of population." He expressed the wish "that the Magistrates should consider whether some other mode of punishment could be advantageously substituted for whipping and whether corporal punishments might not be rendered more efficacious by being resorted to less indiscriminately."<sup>32</sup> On the receipt of Glenelg's instructions, Nicolay asked George F. Dick, the colonial secretary (chief secretary) of Mauritius to send circular letters to the special magistrates on the subject. The magistrates were requested to explain the probable primary causes of the offenses for which the "apprentices" were punished and to suggest the best means of preventing and ultimately stopping the offenses.<sup>33</sup> In March 1838 Glenelg also asked for statements of the principles on which they awarded corporal punishments; he wanted to know whether or not the whip was applied in compliance with the requests of the masters of the "apprentices."<sup>34</sup> I shall consider the responses of the special magistrates to the matters raised by Glenelg in some detail, for they illustrate the attitudes of the magistrates toward the "apprentices" and because the attitudes affected the administration of the "apprenticeship" law.

Most of the special magistrates attributed the major causes of the offenses for which the "apprentices" were punished to the "apprentices" themselves. Their views differed only in these respects: a majority of them believed in multiple causation; others espoused the theory of a single or one overriding factor. The chief exponents of the former view were: C. Anderson of Port Louis district, P. A. Heyliger of Pamplemousses district, F. M. Randall of the district of Rivière du Rempart, J. Regnard of Flacq district, James Hervey of Black River district, and W. C. Pearce and G. Cunningham of the district of Plaines Wilhems. The exponents of the latter theory were: Edward Kelly of Pamplemousses, S. Thatcher of Rivière du Rempart, and H. M. Self of Flacq. I shall discuss the views of the first group and then those of the second.

Anderson admitted that the "capricious" and "vexatious,"



although not strictly illegal, conduct of employers frequently drove the "apprentices" to "acts of desperation which brings chastisement" on the "apprentices." He was of the opinion, however, that the principal cause of the crimes committed by the "apprentices" was their "unbounded" and "incredible ignorance," which fostered evil passions and all the vices they engendered. Another potent factor was the "deep-rooted" and "demoralizing habits" formed by persons reaching manhood and old age in slavery, to whom religion, morality and all the advantages of rectitude of conduct were "unknown."<sup>35</sup> Heyliger's explanations were mainly of an economic character. In his section of Pamplemousses district, stealing and marooning were, according to him, the major crimes. He attributed stealing "greatly to the encouragement and facilities held out to the apprentices by the receivers of stolen property, so readily afforded by the proximity of Port Louis and the numerous small settlers, or shopkeepers along the roads." Marooning was ascribed partly to the opportunities offered to the "apprentices" for clandestine employment for wages, and partly to the encouragement of those who provided shelter to the runaways. The third factor was somewhat sinister in nature. He believed that the "better" food (four ounces of salt meat per day as well as grains) and the shorter working day "enjoyed" by those sentenced in the ordinary courts for serious crimes were likely to lead some "apprentices" to commit grave crimes and to commit them more frequently. The reason for his supposition was that "by the prison regulation the apprentices condemned under the Special Magistrate have no other allowance than plain boil'd rice to work till sunset."<sup>36</sup>

Randall believed that the crimes were caused by the conjunction of the "grossest ignorance" and the "grossest depravity" among the "apprentices," who lacked respect for the property of others and "any practical proof" of the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Having made "so little progress in civilization as to generally speaking not very many degrees above the brute creation," having had no opportunity of receiving instruction of



"any kind," and "abandoned therefore to the violence of their feelings and passions," the "poor apprentices"—Randall was not lacking in fellow-feeling!—"rush on to their fate unrestrained by reason which steps not forward to save them from expending evil."<sup>37</sup> Regnard observed with regret that the "evils" to which Randall referred were the same offenses committed by the "apprentices" in the days of slavery. He attributed them to idleness, ill-will, indolence, habitual drunkenness, and the general lack of true love and emulation among the blacks.<sup>38</sup>

Hervey blamed the crimes partly on the easy availability of liquor and partly on the wrong interpretation that the "apprentices" gave to the Abolition Act of 1833. It appeared to him, he said, that the frequency of the punishments that they received was due chiefly to "an erroneous view which the apprentices formed of the true spirit of the 'Act of Abolition,' conceiving from that epoch, that they could with impunity take many liberties with their masters and superintendents, which the law did not authorize notwithstanding [the fact that] it was fully explained to them, as well as, the consequences of its infringement."<sup>39</sup>

If some "apprentices" wrongly interpreted the Abolition Act of 1833 as giving them "liberties" with their masters, others correctly understood that the so-called Emancipation Act was not emancipatory in nature, and took "liberties" with their masters for the betrayal. Certain crimes became, therefore, an illegitimate means for attaining noble ends. This point was recognized by Pearce, for he stated that the cause of stealing, apart from the "apprentices'" desire to procure the means of indulging in "sensual pleasures," might be traced to "the nervous anxiety with which the apprentice dwells on the prospect of his freedom. He is most anxious to purchase it, and prefers doing so, to being liberated gratuitously. He who buys himself considers the 'affranchi' much his inferior. Many . . . steal to procure the means of effecting this object." Pearce attributed marooning, the second major offense in his district, to the desire of the "apprentices" to escape punishment for stealing.<sup>40</sup> Cunningham agreed that drunkenness

was the cause of petty thefts and marooning, but he found an additional cause of marooning in that section of the Order in Council of September 1834 which permitted the "apprentices" "to stray five miles from home without any pass . . . ." <sup>41</sup> The implication here is that an "apprentice" drunk five miles away from home might not be discovered in time, whereas if he were drunk nearer home he might be discovered and awakened from his stupor by "appropriate" punishment early enough to prevent his running away!

Kelly and Thatcher were generally inclined to share some of the views expressed above, but they were positive that most of the crimes committed by the "apprentices" were due to one factor, namely, drunkenness. Kelly said that the major crimes committed by the "apprentices" in his district were stealing, indolence and marooning. The "apprentices" stole to obtain money to buy arrack, the excessive consumption of which made them drunk. Drunkenness rendered them unwilling to work or incapable of working on the day following the drinking bout; then they ran away to escape punishment. Somehow they managed to obtain the arrack or stole again to buy it; they got drunk again and repeated the cycle. While drunk they frequently became insubordinate and insolent to their master-employers. <sup>42</sup> Thatcher believed also that drunkenness was the fountainhead of insolence, neglect of work, gambling, fighting, marooning and theft. "Ask an apprentice," he said, "the reason of his marooning, he will tell you he got drunk, fell asleep, was not at his work the following day, that he was afraid to go home and marooned." He had such an implicit faith in what he was told that he said that if drunkenness were eliminated, more than half of the punishments would cease. <sup>43</sup> Unlike Kelly and Thatcher, Self believed that the chief source of nearly all offenses committed by the "apprentices" was "idleness." "There was no doubt," he said, that many "apprentices" would rather break stones in prison than do manual work on the plantations, an occupation that "they nearly universally dislike . . . were it not for the stripes which are adjoined to such hard labour." <sup>44</sup>



With the exception of Pearce, who suggested that some "apprentices" stole in order to obtain the means of buying their freedom, none of the special magistrates whose views are discussed in the foregoing paragraphs was interested in the question of the extent to which certain crimes might have been related to the prevailing socioeconomic system. Only two special magistrates were interested in the question, namely, Percy Fitzpatrick of Savanne district and L. C. Clement of the same district—an interesting coincidence. Fitzpatrick believed that there was a connection between some of the crimes and slavery. He attributed the chief causes of the crimes to the union of "the want of moral and religious instruction" with the "influence of savage life" and the laws that protected slavery in the colony. The most prevalent crime was, in his opinion, theft, "a vice generally existing among men in a state of nature." This fault, "natural" to the "savage" was "confirmed" in the French law that deprived him of all legal right to property. He believed that men thus denied "the open right" of getting property were "driven to its secret acquisition, and to habits of theft. Moreover petty thefts if confined to articles of food were not much looked into by the masters who considered that such acts [were] not much to his [sic] disadvantage if the stolen food was consumed by the slave."<sup>45</sup> Clement suggested that the lower frequency of punishment of "apprentices" in the British West Indies might be due to "the treatment which the apprentices of the West India Islands experience from their masters while in a state of slavery," and to the more "advanced stage of civilization" attained by the "apprentices," which made them less inclined, compared to the situation in Mauritius, to commit crimes.<sup>46</sup>

The special magistrates gave varied explanations of the principles that guided them in awarding punishments, but most of the explanations given either reflected their belief in the "savagery" of the "apprentices" or indicated their tender concern for the interests of the "former" slave owners. Anderson stressed the "limited" means available to the special magistrates to make "favourable impressions" on the offenders, especially the har-



dened criminals. He said that imprisonment without labor was "scarcely felt as a punishment" by an "apprentice" who was supplied with "plenty" of food and surrounded by companions with whom he conversed frequently. Imprisonment with labor was also not "satisfactory" for "the act of sitting to break stones for the roads is in reality not nearly so fatiguing as the daily occupation of an apprentice who is employed in the field labour of a plantation." Because of the "unsatisfactory" nature of the two forms of imprisonment, the special magistrates frequently found it necessary to add whipping to one or both forms in order to insure adequate chastisement for the offenses committed. Extra service rendered to the master was not found to be a satisfactory form of punishment for two reasons. First, it could not be applied to nonpraedials. Second, its application to praedials was circumscribed by the fact that some of the employers could not be relied upon to manage it properly, and by the fact that the master would not consider it profitable to hire or appoint an overseer to supervise a few "apprentices" doing extra work. Because of the "limited" means available for punishing crimes, Anderson suggested the extension of solitary cells; the erection of treadmills, the novelty and severity of which would "produce a dread amongst the apprentices which no flogging or common prison detention or work could inspire"; and the reduction of prison allowance of rice from one-and-a-half pounds to a pound a day, a measure that would not fail to benefit the colonial treasury. He added, somewhat proudly, that he had "never allowed more than one pound a day in the country . . . ." <sup>47</sup>

S. Seignette, the other magistrate for Port Louis district, said that he was guided in sentencing "apprentices" to be flogged by the gravity of the offenses committed and the character of the offenders. The special magistrates had considered, he added, doing away with corporal punishment "as far as consistent with the improvement in the moral character of the apprentices . . . ." Finally, he claimed that he rarely gave corporal punishment except in serious cases. <sup>48</sup>

Heyliger of the district of Pamplemousses exhibited a more discriminatory sense in the sentencing of "apprentices." He said that he reserved corporal punishment for "a prompt and striking example" in such cases as robbery, marooning and flagrant insubordination. Offenders were also flogged for want of space in the prisons, for "insufficient" working of those in jail, and because it might be better to cane youthful offenders rather than to send them to jail where they would be mingled with hardened criminals.<sup>49</sup> In the same district, Kelly reserved flogging for those on whom "other modes of punishment would have made little impression," such as habitual maroons and thieves. He did not think that the abandonment of corporal punishment would have any good effect on the morals of blacks because of their "deplorable ignorance," which made them "incapable of appreciating their rights as men," their "absolute state of moral degradation," and because they had been born and reared "under the greatest restraint and in the blindest submission, the apprentice system having done little towards enlightening their ideas or preparing them for becoming members of civilized society." For the forty or so "notorious characters" in his section of the district, he recommended the building of more solitary cells "in consequence of their [sic] being no more than 4 or 5 cells at the Powder Mills Prison, those being necessarily occupied very frequently by offenders belonging to the 1st section." Also, he thought that treadmills might be introduced "with benefit."<sup>50</sup>

In Rivière du Rempart, maroons and thieves found "little favour" with Randall, such offenders being "invariably whipped and almost always imprisoned and condemned to such hard labour, as I had in my power to order." The cane was also administered in cases of "insubordination" and "disobedience," for the sake of preserving "good order" among those who "wantonly" plucked out the eyes of bullocks and other farm animals, and because of lack of such means as treadmills to deter crimes which, he remarked, were on the increase.<sup>51</sup>

The same song of using the cane to check "barbarism" was



chanted by J. Davidson and H. B. Jones of Grand Port. The former said that corporal punishment was given "for example and to maintain good order amongst an unenlightened part of the population." He did not think that offending "apprentices" should be sent to jail without receiving the whip in front of their peers; if an "apprentice" was not flogged before going to jail, he would be "lost sight of and forgotten by his comrades, and the example is lost."<sup>52</sup> Jones insisted that the disposition of commit crimes could only be checked by making punishments adequate to the crimes committed. He recommended the erection of treadmills, the enforcement of silence during the performance of prison labor, and the imposition of solitary confinement for the breach of the silence. If these measures were adopted, they would "nearly supercede," he said, "the necessity of corporal punishments . . . ."<sup>53</sup> The other special magistrates echoed views similar to those stated above.<sup>54</sup>

Three special magistrates admitted taking the interests of the masters of the "apprentices" into consideration in awarding the cane as punishment. Thatcher of Rivière du Rempart denied that the masters induced him to sentence "apprentices" to flogging rather than to jail. As "proof" of this, he said that the planters of his district built a jail at their own expense. He did admit, however, "feeling for," as he put it, several small inhabitants of the colony, each of whom had only an "apprentice." He did not think that such persons "should be deprived of the service of their only servant for a month, after he has been a marron perhaps for a longer period; and I have known many infirm people obliged to fetch water a considerable distance, and others ill with no person to attend to them."<sup>55</sup> Similarly, W. C. Pearce of Plaines Wilhems confessed to "having been influenced by individuals possessing one or two apprentices, and who, had I deprived them of their services for some time, might not only [have] been reduced to the greatest distress, but also deterred from bringing complaints for the future."<sup>56</sup> For different reasons, Fitzpatrick sentenced some "apprentices" to be flogged instead of sending them to jail. He awarded the cane in instances when their imprisonment would



deprive their masters of the services to which the latter were "entitled" by the Order in Council of September 1834. He thought that the planters ought to be indemnified by the state for periods during which the "apprentices" were in prison.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, the special magistrates considered the question of the possibility of reducing the incidence of crimes and improving the habits of the "apprentices," but their replies were not encouraging. Lord Glenelg had talked about the possibility of ultimately extinguishing the crimes. The special magistrates did not bother with the latter aspect of the query, for it was obviously utopian. With respect to the former, I shall illustrate the dismal opinions of the majority of them by stating the conclusions of Anderson, Randall, Self and Kelly. Anderson did not mince words. To Governor Nicolay he wrote:

I will not deceive His Excellency by concealing my candid opinion and my firm belief that the magistrates have not in their power to diminish offences, or in any way to improve the habits of the apprentices except by punishment. The magistrates may and constantly do offer counsel and advice, but they might give their words to the wind with equal benefit. Until the soil is prepared the seed cannot be thrown in with any prospect of success, and unless extensive measures are taken to cultivate the minds of the young they will become a wilderness of rank and pernicious weeds whose blighting influence in the general community will be continued, and its beneficial effects felt and regretted long after the special magistrates have been forgotten in the graves.<sup>58</sup>

Were the adult and "young adult" "apprentices" such dense harbingers and dispensers of evil influence as Anderson portrayed them? Randall was inclined to think so, for he was certain that only the effective use of the whip would do for people who "have made so little progress in civilization, as to be generally speaking not very many degrees above the brute creation . . . ."<sup>59</sup> Self was inclined to be more "generous," for he stated that "the greater proportion of the field labourers being in a state of semi-barbarism, and totally devoid of all means of instruction, nothing but strong measures, and a constant recourse to corporal punishment, has any

effect upon them.”<sup>60</sup> Lastly, Self did not see how one can reform people “incapable” of distinguishing between right and wrong. The “apprentices” had to be changed, he said, by religious and moral instruction, “and they must be taught the difference between right and wrong ere they can be led to feel the injustice and wickedness of robbery and the baneful effects of drunkenness, and how much an indulgence in these crimes is calculated to effect [sic] their individual welfare and happiness here and after.”<sup>61</sup>

The special magistrates who thought that the “apprentices” could be redeemed were very few. Clement of Savanne subscribed to the theory of preventing crimes by increasing the severity of punishments for the crimes, but he also believed that the cultivation of good feeling between the masters and the “apprentices” would help in the reduction of the offenses of that latter. He cited his own experience: “I have now only to say, that it affords me much pleasure in being able to state for the Governor’s information, that the apprentices of my section have continued to conduct themselves in an orderly way for some time past, that I have in many instances observed much improvement, and that I consider their general conduct as being highly praiseworthy.”<sup>62</sup> Well-behaved “apprentices,” with “general conduct” worthy of being praised—that was amazing! The other special magistrate who believed that the “apprentices” were redeemable was Fitzpatrick. Although he did apply the punitive punishments prescribed by the law, and subscribed to the belief that the “former” slave proprietors were “rightly” entitled to the services of the “apprentices,” he said that he “always” considered “the influence of any punishments as of a vast inferiority to that of moral and religious instruction.” He added: “Every institution . . . which facilitates their becoming proprietors by honest means would render theft less frequent.”<sup>63</sup>

With most of the special magistrates firmly convinced that the “apprentices” were by nature prone to committing crimes, and that only severity could compel them to desist from their wrong doing, it is not surprising that they applied methodically the battery

of punishments prescribed by law, and that they sometimes exceeded the prescriptions for certain offenses. Fortunately for the "apprentices," they were spared from further experiencing a drastic penal regime, administered by biased magistrates, by external events that they had hardly anticipated.

### **The System Aborted**

In April 1838, following the liberation of the "apprentices" of Antigua and Barbados by local legislative enactments, Lord Glenelg, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, addressed two dispatches to Governor Nicolay on the issue of reclassifying the "apprentices" and the need for an early termination of the "apprenticeship" system. The substance of the dispatches was communicated to the Mauritius Council of Government on September 3. The question of an early termination of the "apprenticeship" system was considered and rejected in the session of the council held on September 10.

The reasons given for the rejection of the proposal combined specious claims with the assertion of "rights" conferred by law. The resolution adopted by the council claimed that the "former" slaves had been, from the time that the Abolition Act of 1833 was passed to September 1838, in a state of "undisturbed tranquility," that the praedials were satisfied with their classification, and that there was "no manifestation of any jealousy" on their part on account of the approaching liberation of the nonpraedial "apprentices." It claimed that the "good" condition of the "apprentices" was "well established" by the reports of the special magistrates, by the employers' observance of the "protective" laws that regulated the feeding, clothing, and hours of work of the "apprentices," and by the "humane attention of their employers towards the young children, the aged, and the infirm." The resolution alluded to the abuses that were said to have been committed on the "apprentices" elsewhere and that had aroused the humane con-



cern of the English people, but it claimed that such abuses did not exist in Mauritius.<sup>64</sup>

The resolution suggested that "progressive" emancipation, by purchase and by the "benevolence" of the "former" slave owners, was better than "accelerated" emancipation. It said that 3,500 "apprentices" had been emancipated and that more of the non-praedials would be emancipated before February 1, 1839, when the remainder would be fully free by law. The authors of the resolution were confident that the continuation of the "apprenticeship" system thereafter "will no doubt operate, in the same effective manner, on the apprentices attached to the soil." Next, the council argued that hastened emancipation would not be advantageous to the "apprentices" themselves, because they were "not" as advanced in "civilization" as those in the West Indies, particularly the ones in Antigua, who were reported by the clergy resident there to be "in a fit state for the enjoyment of entire liberty." The resolution said that the members of the council and the employers of Mauritius "fully" appreciated and "entirely" shared "the solicitude of the people of England, in their generous wishes to ameliorate the condition of the apprenticed Negroes," but that they were much inclined to doubt that the people of England were informed of the condition of the "apprentices" and their fitness for early liberation. The council also argued that "accelerated" emancipation would be "greatly detrimental to the interests of the colony at large, as it would bring into confusion, and disorder, the many transfers of landed property, which have been made upon the good faith of the Imperial Parliament, thereby creating much local embarrassment, and leading to extensive litigation."<sup>65</sup> The last objection was a reference to the fact that many estates had been bought and sold on the assumption that the "former" slaves were integral parts of the estates on which they lived, and that the extra indemnification provided by the black "apprenticeship" would not be abridged.

Although the Council of Government had refused to entertain the question of an early termination of the "apprenticeship" sys-

tem, the issue was revived by further developments in the British West Indies. The spread of the emancipation virus there convinced even the diehard sympathizers with slavery that it would be untenable to allow the institution to continue in Mauritius. In his dispatch of July 11, 1838, to Nicolay, Glenelg recommended that the council enact a measure for the "immediate and entire" liberation of the praedial "apprentices" from their unexpired terms. Nicolay communicated the request to the council on October 29, but a discussion of the matter was postponed until November 12 to allow the members of the council to ascertain "public" (that is planters') opinion and sentiments on the question.<sup>66</sup>

When the Council of Government met on November 12, 1838, it discussed resolutions recapitulating the arguments advanced in September against "accelerated" emancipation, and embodying new points. Many members were convinced that the rest of the British West Indian islands had followed the examples of Antigua and Barbados not only because "the state of excitement would not permit a resistance to the stream without evident danger," but also because "this entire emancipation has not been effected without a hope of some further indemnity from the mother country." The members argued that the council could not "assume a power contrary to the provisions of an Act of Parliament so wisely framed, and so conducive to the real interests and happiness of the negro population in Mauritius." They said further that consideration should be given to the problem of turning "adrift" "apprentices," "without a home or shelter for infant children, the aged, or the infirm." The Council had made provisions for the "shelters" that would be needed, but the acceleration of emancipation would not allow enough time for the completion of the preparatory measures, and would be "replete with danger to colonial society, and harmful to the praedial apprentices." There was a "minor" modification of one of the previous arguments. Formerly, the "apprentices" were said "not" to be as advanced in "civilization" as their counterparts in the West Indies. Perhaps as a compliment to the latter, the former were now described as being in a

state of "non-civilization."<sup>67</sup> We are not told the reasons for their relapse from "semi-barbarism" to "utter barbarism" within two months!

Finally, the opponents of "premature" emancipation of the supposedly manumitted slaves reaffirmed the point that they could not give away "rights" guaranteed by law. They maintained that "nothing but the full assent of the proprietors of estates and masters of apprentices" could justify the shortening of the "apprenticeship" system, secured by the sixteenth clause of the Abolition Act of 1833, which expressly stated:

that it shall not be lawful for any such Governor, Council, and Assembly, or for any such local Legislature, or for His (Her) Majesty in Council, by any such Acts of Assembly, Ordinances, or Orders in Council as aforesaid, to make or establish any enactment, regulation, provision, rule, or order which shall be in anywise repugnant or contradictory to this present Act, or any part thereof, but that every such enactment, regulation, provision, rule, or order shall be and is hereby declared to be absolutely null and void and of no effect.<sup>68</sup>

The assertion that the period of "apprenticeship" could be modified only with the full assent of the slaving interests was too much for a few members of the Council of Government to bear, although they agreed that the clause quoted above did not empower the local legislature to adopt Glenelg's proposal. Amendments to remove their objection were not adopted. The resolution, embodying all the arguments advanced against the revived request for "accelerated" emancipation, was also not passed.

When the members met in session on November 19, 1838, they tried to find acceptable wordings for the major points on which they agreed, but they failed. On November 21 they adopted the following resolution, couched in a more "polished" language of opposition:

The Council recognizes that its constitution does not give it the power to decide by a legislative enactment a question of so much importance, and which affects such numerous private interests, regulated and guaranteed, moreover, by an Act of Parliament.



Neither does the constitution of the Council authorize it to express the wishes and intentions of the inhabitants, whose concurrence and consent only could warrant a change in the provisions of the Act which has established the conditions of emancipation.

But if the Council were to give an opinion on the subject, it would be, that, notwithstanding the disposition which the inhabitants may feel to enter into the views of an early liberation, the most serious motives would render the execution of that disposition, in the present circumstances of the colony, extremely difficult, and dangerous alike for the public order and tranquility, and the welfare of all classes of the population.

The Council is not ignorant that all the colonial transactions have been made and entered into upon the faith of the full and entire execution of the provisions of the Act of Parliament; and it cannot be disguised that the shortening of the time of liberation would cause injury to private interests to an extent of which the consequences cannot be calculated.

And, with respect to public interest, it would be impossible to comply with the desire expressed by the people of England and Her Majesty's Government without those guarantees for good order and tranquility which so great a change in the constitution of society renders indispensably necessary.

The Council resolves in consequence, that it will proceed with the laws and regulations, which are, moreover, under any circumstances, of urgent necessity, in consequence of the approach of the liberation of the non-*praedial* apprentices; and the Board would request of his Excellency to cause them to be prepared.<sup>69</sup>

The "improved" opposition of the proprietary class to an early termination of the apprenticeship" system did no good—it had been overtaken by events. An Order in Council, issued on November 5, 1838, was on its way to Mauritius. It empowered the governor to issue a proclamation declaring the *praedial* "apprentices" living in the colony after February 1, 1839, "absolutely freed and discharged of and from the then remaining term of their apprenticeship . . . ." <sup>70</sup> Governor Nicolay received the order on March 10. On the following day he issued a proclamation, declaring all *praedial* "apprentices" "absolutely freed and discharged" from their remaining term of "apprenticeship" as of March 31. <sup>71</sup> There was some delay in the promulgation of the Order in Council in the dependencies of Mauritius because of the difficulties of

communicating with the islands, but the order was duly proclaimed there.<sup>72</sup>

In Mauritius the planters and the masters of black “apprentices” read the emancipation proclamation with apprehension about the future state of the plantation industry. Among the persons emancipated, however, the long-awaited freedom was a cause of rejoicing and long celebrations. In December 1838 Nicolay had sent a detachment of troops to the Seychelles in response to the planters’ fear that the termination of nonpraedial “apprenticeship” on February 1, 1839, would lead to a disturbance of peace. No such disturbance occurred and the troops had to be withdrawn.<sup>73</sup> Within several weeks the praedials were also free. As in Mauritius, the discomfiture of the planters, caused by the “premature” termination of the servitude of the blacks, was a cause of rejoicing for the underlings. A new era followed, necessitating new adjustments between white masters and their erstwhile slaves. How whites and blacks responded to the new times is the subject of the next chapter.

## Notes

1. Enclosure in Glenelg to Nicolay, November 6, 1838, C.O. 167/205.
2. Abstract of District Returns of Slaves in the Mauritius at the Time of the Emancipation, in the Year 1835, C.O. 170/21.
3. Eliza Combe to R. M. Lyon, a former professor at the Royal College, n.d., enclosed in Nicolay to Glenelg, November 22, 1838, C.O. 167/205.
4. The materials in this section of the chapter are taken from Great Britain, *Papers in Explanation of Measures Adopted by His Majesty's Government, for Giving Effect to the Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies, Part II, 1833-1835*, P.P. L, 278 (1835), pp. 372-89.
5. Special Justice J. Minchin to the Colonial Secretary of Mauritius, May 13, 1835, enclosed in Nicolay to Glenelg, October 28, 1836, C.O. 167/193.
6. A Colonial Office Memorandum, October 26, 1838, in Nicolay to Glenelg, June 25, 1838, C.O. 167/203.
7. Enclosure in Nicolay to Glenelg, November 13, 1838, C.O. 167/205.
8. Mauritius Laws, 1835 and 1836, C.O. 169/2.
9. The materials in this paragraph and the paragraphs that immediately follow are derived from Mauritius and Dependencies, Ordinance No. 16 of 1835, C.O. 169/2.

10. Great Britain, *Report from the Select Committee on Negro Apprenticeship in the Colonies*, P.P. XV, 560 (1836), pp. 68-69.
11. Great Britain, *British Guiana and Mauritius*, P.P. LII, 180 (1838), pp. 62-66.
12. Nicolay to Glenelg, July 25, 1836, C.O. 167/190.
13. Nicolay to Glenelg, January 21, 1837, C.O. 167/196.
14. Nicolay to Glenelg, August 2, 1836, C.O. 167/190.
15. Glenelg to Nicolay, December 17, 1836, in *ibid.*
16. Anderson to Glenelg, February 1, 1837, enclosed in Nicolay to Glenelg, March 12, 1837, C.O. 167/196.
17. Nicolay to Glenelg, March 12, 1837, in *ibid.*
18. James Blackhouse to Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, May 14, 1838, C.O. 167/208.
19. Edward Baker, "Observations on the Apprenticeship System in Mauritius," May 1, 1838, in *ibid.*
20. Great Britain, *Immigration of Labourers into the West India Colonies and Mauritius*, P.P. XXXIX, 325 (1847), pp. 256-58, 261.
21. Mauritius, Proceedings of the Council of Government, September 10, November 12, 19 and 21, 1838, C.O. 170/11.
22. Anderson to Russell, May 1, 1840, C.O. 167/216.
23. Baker, "Observations," C.O. 167/208.
24. Blackhouse to Buxton, May 14, 1838, C.O. 167/208.
25. Enclosure in Nicolay to Glenelg, March 12, 1837, C.O. 167/196.
26. Nicolay to Glenelg, October 17, 1836, C.O. 167/191 and 193.
27. Enclosure in *ibid.*
28. Nicolay to Glenelg, October 17, 1836, C.O. 167/191 and 193.
29. Blackhouse to Buxton, May 14, 1836, C.O. 167/208.
30. Minchin's Journal, C.O. 167/193.
31. Reports of the Special Magistrates relative to Corporal Punishments, enclosed in Nicolay to Glenelg, January 31, 1838, C.O. 167/201.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. Nicolay to Glenelg, August 20, 1838, C.O. 167/204.
35. Anderson to Dick, September 21, 1837, Reports of the Special Magistrates relative to Corporal Punishments, C.O. 167/201.
36. Heliger to Dick, September 21, 1837, in *ibid.*
37. Randall to Dick, September 26, 1837, in *ibid.*
38. Regnard to Dick, September 20, 1837, in *ibid.*
39. Hervey to Dick, September 18, 1837, in *ibid.*
40. Pearce to Dick, October 24, 1837, in *ibid.*
41. Cunningham to Dick, September 26, 1837, in *ibid.*
42. Kelly to Dick, September 26, 1837, in *ibid.*
43. Thatcher to Dick, September 27, 1837, in *ibid.*
44. Self to Dick, September 23, 1837, in *ibid.*
45. Fitzpatrick to Dick, November 4, 1837, in *ibid.*



46. Clement to Dick, October 19, 1837, in *ibid*.
47. Anderson to Dick, September 21, 1837, in *ibid*.
48. Seignette to Dick, July 23, 1838, Reports of the Special Justices relative to the Principle on Which They Have Hitherto Inflicted Corporal Punishment, enclosed in Nicolay to Glenelg, August 25, 1838, C.O. 167/204.
49. Heyliger to Dick, July 23, 1838, in *ibid*.
50. Kelly to Dick, September 20, 1837, C.O. 167/201; Kelly to Dick, July 2, 1838, C.O. 167/204.
51. Randall to Dick, July 17, 1828, C.O. 167/204.
52. Davidson to Dick, July 7, 1838, in *ibid*.
53. Jones to Dick, September 21, 1837, C.O. 167/201.
54. See the two reports of the special magistrates in C.O. 167/201 and 204.
55. Thatcher to Dick, July 1838, C.O. 167/204.
56. Pearce to Dick, August 9, 1838, in *ibid*.
57. Fitzpatrick to Dick, August 1838, in *ibid*.
58. Anderson to Dick, September 21, 1837, C.O. 167/201.
59. Randall to Dick, September 26, 1837, in *ibid*.
60. Self to Dick, September 23, 1837, in *ibid*.
61. Kelly to Dick, September 20, 1837, in *ibid*.
62. Clement to Dick, October 19, 1837, in *ibid*.
63. Fitzpatrick to Dick, November 4, 1837, in *ibid*; Fitzpatrick to Dick, August 1838, C.O. 167/204.
64. Mauritius, Proceedings of the Council of Government, September 10, 1838, C.O. 170/11.
65. *Ibid*.
66. Proceedings of the Council of Government, October 29, 1838, C.O. 167/205.
67. Proceedings of the Council of Government, November 12, 1838, in *ibid*.
68. Quoted in *ibid*.
69. Proceedings of the Council of Government, November 21, 1838, in *ibid*.
70. Enclosure in Glenelg to Nicolay, November 6, 1838, C.O. 167/205.
71. Enclosure in Nicolay to Glenelg, March 15, 1839, C.O. 167/209.
72. Nicolay to Glenelg, May 17, 1839, C.O. 167/210.
73. Nicolay to Lord Normanby, September 27, 1839, C.O. 167/212.

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# **The Post-Emancipation Period, 1839-75**

### **Impact of Emancipation in Mauritius**

The termination of the "apprenticeship" system was followed by a massive withdrawal of the emancipated slaves from the plantations. The planters were given a foretaste of the "desertion" during the period of serfdom, particularly toward the end of it, by the blacks who purchased their freedom and who left their masters to set up their own households. At first their number was small, but by 1838 it was considerable. Those who located themselves in "an irregular manner" along the Mauritian coast and on the sides of public roads attracted the attention of Governor Nicolay. In June 1838 he asked the large proprietors to interest themselves in the attraction and retention of the majority of the "apprentices" still living on the estates.<sup>1</sup> The planters had already anticipated the "faithlessness" of the blacks and had taken precautions to remedy "the growing evil," as Stipendiary Magistrate C. Anderson put it.<sup>2</sup> With the permission of the government, they had begun to recruit and import Indian workers at their own expense, and by the end of 1838 there were about 25,000 Indian workers on the island. Because the number of imported workers more than made up for the number of blacks who left the plantations, the planters made no effort to retain the services of the latter.

The confidence of the planters did not last long, however. It was shaken by the "premature" termination of praedial "apprenticeship" in March 1839. On May 4 Nicolay reported that "a great number of the large sugar estates had been almost wholly aban-

done by the former apprentices . . ."; he attributed the "almost complete desertion of certain districts" partly to the "predilection" of the ex-slaves "for establishing themselves in particular parts of the Island, owing to their comparative local advantages over others . . . ." <sup>3</sup> By July the governor was not so sure of the reasons for their withdrawal from the plantations, for besides the able-bodied blacks "so many aged and infirm persons" had left the plantations and "cast themselves upon the world, which they have done deliberately in many instances, where the former masters were willing to take charge of them, and to afford them the same means of support as formerly." Nicolay was baffled not only by the fact that the aged and infirm ex-slaves were glad to exchange a life of "certainty" and "comfort" on the plantations for the uncertainties of the world outside, but also by the disinclination of the able-bodied ones to work on the plantations for hire. "I fear," he said, "that, in too many instances, they have mistaken idleness for freedom and sensual indulgence for a mark of liberty." In spite of his disappointment, he was willing to make great allowance for a people just released from servitude. He expressed hope that "hereafter they will generally return to regular labour," although not as in the former days or on the same plantations. <sup>4</sup>

Nicolay's hopes for blacks' return to "regular labour" on the scene of their enslavement and servitude were not realized. Blacks' celebrations of freedom were peaceful, but they were long and disquieting to the employers. Most of the blacks refused to sign one-year labor contracts before the stipendiary magistrates. <sup>5</sup> In April 1839 some four to five thousand of them had agreed to work as contract laborers for one year under the pressure of circumstances, which Anderson explained as follows:

it was only from a confused and imperfect idea of their new condition, the difficulty of finding a hut to retire to, or the influence of the stipendiary magistrates of the districts, that . . . the men were induced to engage as field-labourers for a year, which terminated in April 1840, without the most remote chance of any of the engagements being renewed. <sup>6</sup>



Such pressures were eased by 1841. By this date, according to a later report, "the Ex-Apprentices had for the most part ceased to labour on the Sugar Estates . . . ." <sup>7</sup> In 1844 the number of those working on the sugar estates was said to be 3,725; by June 1847 the number had declined to 1,890 and "most of them come and go as they please." <sup>8</sup>

The almost complete withdrawal of black labor from the plantations created a crisis for the sugar industry. The planters felt the pinch acutely, for the withdrawal roughly coincided with the suspension of the emigration of Indian laborers to Mauritius by the imperial government in India as a result of grave abuses. The indentured workers that migrated to Mauritius were brought to the island in such crowded ships that many of them suffered greatly. Diseases and insanitary living conditions took a heavy toll of their lives. Between 1837 and 1843 the average annual mortality rate among them was reckoned to be 4.2 percent. <sup>9</sup> Anticipating a regular and increasing flow of Indian labor, and assuming that the services of the black "apprentices" were guaranteed until 1841, many planters had extended the acreage of land under cultivation and incurred heavy expenses in erecting additional buildings required by the anticipated increase in the sugar cane crop. Other planters had made "extensive purchases of estates" with hopes for a lucrative return on their investment. <sup>10</sup> Now they could not count on both sources of labor.

Stung by the coincidence of the "perfidy" of the ex-slaves and the "inconsiderate" action of the government of India, the Mauritian planters denounced the "premature" termination of the "apprenticeship" system. Their anguish is illustrated in the following comment, which appeared in the June 10, 1839, issue of *The Mauritian*:

The late apprentices having, by an Act of which no one can contest the illegality, been made free, the services of thirty thousand individuals have been withdrawn from agriculture, the planters arbitrarily dispossessed, and their estates deserted. This Act of spoliation having been shamelessly consummated, and the last links of bondage for ever

broken, it was at all events natural and reasonable to expect that we should all be placed upon an equal footing, that masters and servants, workmen and employers, should all be subjected to the same laws, that the newly freed, who have been considered worthy of admission to civil rights, would be bound to fulfil the duties of citizens, and to conform to the same Police regulations which restrain the remainder of society. Not at all.<sup>11</sup>

The comment makes it clear that the planters had no illusions about the meaning of the so-called apprenticeship system. To them the blacks were breathing property, unfit for the enjoyment of civil rights. But since the imperial government had "robbed" them of their "property" and broken "the last links of bondage," they expected that the ex-slaves should work for them in a "new" relationship of masters and servants. What they wanted was a "clear" definition and stringent enforcement of the law against "vagrancy," which would prevent the blacks from working for themselves (as many of them were already doing) or walking about in "idleness."

Unfortunately for the planters, the colonial authorities did not interpret "clearly" enough the Orders in Council designed in 1838 to "smoothen" the transition from servile to free labor. For example, the governor and the stipendiary magistrates interpreted the law to mean that the ex-slaves could not be punished as "vagrants" or forced to work unless they became recipients of public doles.<sup>12</sup> Initially, the demands for public assistance rarely came from the emacipated blacks, nor even from the aged and infirm among them.<sup>13</sup> The colonial authorities were also not in the position to enforce the order prohibiting "squatting" on government or privately owned lands. Under the order a "squatter" could be removed by a stipendiary magistrate from the land that he occupied unless he had probable claim to the land or had been in "quiet possession" of it for a year prior to the promulgation of the order.<sup>14</sup> The order was promulgated on March 11, 1839, but the ex-slaves were careful to "squat" in faraway places, such as forests and remote valleys, beyond the easy reach of the colonial officials.

Possessing no means to compel the freedmen to work for them, the planters and other employers searched desperately for alternative sources of labor. An immigration committee was formed in December 1839 for the purpose of obtaining permission to recruit workers from abroad. In January 1840 the committee asked for permission to import workers from Madagascar, the Comoro islands, and the east coast of the African mainland. The committee proposed to pay fees to the governments and chiefs of those places for the privilege of importing workers.<sup>15</sup> In a letter forwarding the appeal, Governor Nicolay, who was sympathetic to the whole idea, recommended that the government of India be asked to lift the ban that it imposed on the emigration of Indian laborers to Mauritius. Also, he suggested that new efforts should be made to negotiate a treaty with Queen Ranavalana of Madagascar in order to encourage "free intercourse" between her country and Mauritius. If the efforts failed, negotiations might then be concluded with the chiefs on the southeastern coast of Africa and with neighboring chiefs "whose subjects may wish to seek an asylum in Mauritius from the oppression of the Hovas, and who may, at the same time, be willing to work for their living upon fair and equitable terms."<sup>16</sup> The proposals were considered by Lord John Russell, Glenelg's successor at the Colonial Office. On August 19, 1840, he addressed a dispatch to Sir Lionel Smith, the successor of Nicolay as governor, stating that he could not approve the immigration scheme.<sup>17</sup>

The employers persisted in their search for a solution to the labor crisis. Early in 1840 a society was formed for the promotion of "industry" in Mauritius. The society then merged with the immigration committee to form the Free Labour Association (F.L.A.). The F.L.A. asked the government to advance funds annually for the recruitment of laborers from Madagascar, Muscat and other lands. It suggested that the government should recover the money advanced by means of an indirect tax on such items as spirits and by annual assessments on the employers.<sup>18</sup> The idea of subsidized labor immigration was adopted in 1842. In the same year the



government of India finally agreed to lift the ban on the export of surplus labor from India under proper safeguards.

Under the new immigration scheme, the government of Mauritius assumed the responsibility of overseeing the recruitment of Indian laborers and of guaranteeing their outward and return passages. A Protector of Immigrants was appointed in Mauritius and immigration agents were posted in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. The subsidized recruitment began at the end of 1842 and ended in 1844. Thereafter, the expense of recruitment was borne by the Mauritius government, thus underscoring the importance of the sugar industry to the island.<sup>19</sup> In the year 1843, 30,218 Indian workers were imported at a cost of £196,861. In 1844 the cost of importing 9,709 workers was £133,972. In 1845 the expenditure on the importation of 8,918 workers was £64,378. Between 1843 and 1852, £751,295 was spent on recruiting a total of 101,218 indentured workers.<sup>20</sup> On arrival at Port Louis, the workers were lodged at the immigration depot before they were distributed among the employers who had indented for their services. The contracts were generally for five years, the laborers receiving wages in addition to food rations.

At first the resumption of Indian immigration eased but did not solve the labor problem created by the withdrawal of blacks from the plantations. Numerically, the workers imported during the period 1843-45 were sufficient to replace the blacks who had worked as praedial "apprentices." A number of factors, however, combined to reduce the size and the efficiency of the working force. Some of the Indian laborers were recruited from the non-agricultural castes in India. Even those who were "seasoned" farm workers soon learned that plantation work was not easy in Mauritius. The laborers responded to the plantation rigor in a number of ways: some ran away from their masters; some took short French leave of absence; others changed their masters. Also, allowance had to be made for sickness. According to the estimate of the committee appointed in 1845 to investigate the causes of labor shortage, the four factors reduced the working force by 27

percent. Because of the difficulty of "breaking" the new arrivals into the plantation routine, the committee estimated that the work of some 30,000 Indian laborers only equaled that done by 23,000 slaves.<sup>21</sup>

Besides the difficulty of making the Indians work as efficiently as the ex-slaves, there was also the problem of feeding them. Since the Indians did not like manioc and other foodstuffs that formed the staple diet of the slaves, the employers had to import large quantities of rice and other foods from India. Until 1845 there was sufficient rice to feed the Indian laborers, but the stock of rice fell short in that year, giving rise to a "rice scare." The shortage eased thereafter, but the problem remained. Both whites and "coloureds" did not look with favor on the concessions given to the Indians. Their organs urged the Mauritius government to do something "towards the substitution of manioc and indigenous roots for rice, as part of the rations given to the Indian labourers." One contributor to *The Mauritius Times* put the matter as follows:

What would be said of the extravagance of a traveller who, in a strange country, is not content with the ordinary food of its inhabitants, but insists upon being supplied with that to which he has been accustomed elsewhere, or to the impertinence of a servant, who should stipulate, before entering His Excellency's household in Mauritius, that he should be fed upon English bread and butter? The answer is simple. The one would be told to go about his business, and the other left to starve, or to return home.<sup>22</sup>

The answer to the food problem was not so simple, for the planters needed the services of the Indians. The government claimed that it had tried unsuccessfully in 1843 and 1845 to induce the planters to cultivate food for the laborers, and tried to satisfy the critics. On June 4, 1848, the colonial secretary to the government issued a circular letter to the stipendiary magistrates and other district officials, advising them to use, as opportunities offered, "all proper influence" with the Indians to accept locally grown food as part of their daily rations.<sup>23</sup>

After 1845 large influxes of indentured workers from India and

“careful” management of the workers gave a big fillip to the sugar industry and created wealth for the planters. The sugar output is illustrated by the following export figures:

**Table 6**  
**Sugar Exports<sup>24</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Quantities of Sugar Exported (French lbs.)</b>
1846	122,494,822
1847	114,525,743
1848	110,989,017
1849	126,678,577
1850	110,937,388
1851	133,329,092
1852	141,639,662

The prosperity of the sugar industry had a wholesome effect on the public revenue. Between 1853 and 1859 the revenue doubled.<sup>25</sup> The blissful reign of “King Sugar” called for improvements in the means of transportation. The road-improvement program, initiated by Farquhar and expanded by Cole, had connected Port Louis to Mahébourg and Souillac with serviceable roads. Animal-drawn carts hauled sugar along the roads to Port Louis for export, but because the carts broke down frequently, the more economical sugar barges were used to transport the sugar of the outlying districts from the chief centers, Souillac and Grand River South East. Road and water transport were, however, unable to keep up with the produce of the sugar factories.<sup>26</sup> To solve the problem Governor James Macaulay Higginson (1851-57) proposed the building of railways. An engineer, appointed in the “mother country” to survey Mauritius and to suggest the railway routes, arrived in Mauritius in July 1858. His report was approved by the Council of Government in February 1859 and construction of the lines started soon thereafter.<sup>27</sup> The north line, connecting Port Louis to Grand River South East via Mapou, was opened to traffic in 1864. A year later the midland line, connecting Port



Louis to Mahébourg through Curepipe, was opened to traffic. In January 1878 the line joining the midland line to Souillac was opened. Other improvements included the inauguration of regular steamship services between Aden and Mauritius in 1852. After 1864 French steamships en route to Aden called at Mauritius.<sup>28</sup>

Besides sustaining the prosperous plantation industry of Mauritius, the inflow of Indians transformed the racial and ethnic complexion of the colony. Between 1843 and 1872 some 352,785 Indian immigrants came to Mauritius.<sup>29</sup> Many of them returned to India either before or after completing their indenture or "industrial residency," as it was sometimes called.<sup>30</sup> Those who remained, as well as a smaller number of Indian merchants and artisans, changed the racial composition of the island. In 1846 the Indian population numbered 56,245 out of a total resident Mauritian population of 158,462; in 1851 there were 77,996 Indians out of a total population of 180,823; in 1861 Indians numbered 172,425 out of a total population of 310,050. Indian population on the three dates represented 35.4, 43.0 and 55 percent respectively.<sup>31</sup> In addition to Indians there were immigrants from Burma, Ceylon and China, who engaged in trading or worked as artisans and butchers. The small Chinese community specialized in the latter occupation. The collective Asian presence produced the following change in the demographic constitution of Mauritius:

**Table 7**  
**The Resident Population of Mauritius According**  
**to Countries or Land of Birth<sup>32</sup>**  
**(in % of total)**

	1851	1861
British	1.3	0.40
Other Europeans	0.9	0.50
Africans	56.9	40.30
Asians	40.1	58.30
Americans	0.0	0.04
Australians	0.0	0.05
Others	0.8	0.50

As the table shows, the Asians had replaced Africans as the most numerous racial groups in Mauritius, besides replacing them as the props of the sugar industry.

Another by-product of the importation of cheap Indian labor to replace the ex-slaves who had left the plantations was the strengthening of the planters' belief that the labor of the "inferior" classes existed for the exploitation of the "superior" classes. Many Indian workers earned more money during their five years of "industrial residency" than they could have earned in their land of origin, but the indenture system was an onerous one. Heavy fines were imposed on them for their absences from work. "The heaviest fine was," as Barnwell and Toussaint have pointed out, "that the labourer lost two days' pay for every day on which he stayed away from work. Sometimes fines were so heavy that the labourer received no wages at all at the end of the month; he then worked for his food only, and was thus little different from a slave,"<sup>33</sup> What Burton Benedict called the "double cut" but amounted really to a "quintuple cut" was introduced in 1847: A laborer who was absent from work for more than six days in a month owed his employer an additional month of service. Great pressure was put on those who had completed their five-year contracts to sign new contracts. The terms of indenture provided for free return passages to India, but the privilege was withheld between 1853 and 1859. In 1867 a pass system was introduced for the purpose of controlling the movements of those who had served their indenture and who were styled "old immigrants." An "old immigrant" who lost his pass paid a fee of one pound for the issue of another one. In addition he was treated as a "vagrant" if he did not engage in "meaningful" employment. The wages of the new immigrants were irregularly paid and were often in arrears, while their housing was generally bad.<sup>34</sup>

The abuse of Indian laborers led to official inquiries and actions of sorts. An inquiry by a police commission was held in 1871-72. In 1874 a royal commission appointed in 1872 exposed the abuses to which the laborers were subjected.<sup>35</sup> As a result of the exposure,

the Mauritius legislature passed a new labor code in 1878, which came into force on January 1, 1879. The government expressed high hopes for the new labour law:

Owing to the conciliatory and moderate spirit in which it was administered, and to the loyal co-operation of the planters and of the Council of Government the great changes introduced by the law were initiated without difficulty, and it soon became regarded as a measure [sic] which, wisely put in force, and conformed to, must conduce to the interest and harmony of all classes of the community.<sup>36</sup>

The "great changes" required the employers of labor to provide improved houses for their laborers, to pay the latter their wages and rations regularly and not to cheat them through the "truck system" (the running of shops where high-priced goods were sold to the workers), to provide them with adequate care and to permit those workers who wished to return to India to do so. Official inspections were to be made to insure that planters complied with the provisions of the law. Unfortunately, the enforcement of the law fell far short of its spirit. What happened subsequently has been summarized by Benedict: Many of the regulations were "evaded or insufficiently enforced and it was not until 1922 that labourers were really free to engage where they wished. Estate owners and managers were able to exercise their considerable influence to maintain a controlled cheap labour market."<sup>37</sup>

The exploitation of servile labour was also partly responsible for the tendency of Indians in better economic circumstances to "pass" as members of the "general population." The latter term was used before the abolition of slavery to designate Europeans, the creole descendants of Europeans, and the "Free Persons of Colour." In the census of 1846 the term was so used and the former "apprentices" were listed separately. In subsequent censuses the ex-slaves were merged with the "general population." In the census returns of 1846 many Indians tried to "pass" as members of the "general population," for the first report on that census by the census committee states: "In the columns appropriated to



Indians are inserted only those who declare themselves immigrant labourers, omitting other natives of India, and a few immigrants who having become proprietors or householders, did not return themselves as immigrants, both of which classes are included in the general population.”<sup>38</sup> “Passing” as members of the “general population” was not, incidentally, practiced only by the Indian “social climbers.” Some blacks who purchased their freedom during the “apprenticeship” period also “passed” into the “general population.” Whether those who “passed” were black or yellow skinned, the tendency to “pass” illustrates the condescension with which the propertied classes looked upon the “inferior” classes. In the post-emancipation period it was the labor of the lowly Indian segment of the working class that enabled the planters to recover quickly from the labor crisis created by the exodus of the ex-slaves from the plantations, a recovery that eluded the planters in the Seychelles for several decades.

### **Impact of Emancipation in the Seychelles**

The impact of the emancipation of some 4,000 “apprentices”<sup>39</sup> on the economy of the Seychelles was the subject of occasional comments by contemporary visitors to the islands. In a book recounting his experiences in the suppression of the slave trade in the Indian Ocean during the early 1860s, William Cope Devereux wrote: “All the islands show signs of departed industry; the wrecks of old sugar-mills may be seen scattered about the country and covered with vegetation, the abode of owls and other birds, and rapidly fallen to decay.” He attributed the signs of “departed industry” to the effects of the abolition of slavery and “the inherent laziness” of the inhabitants, which made labor scarce.<sup>40</sup> In 1875 J. Horne, Sub-Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Mauritius, visited the Seychelles and reported that cotton cultivation seemed to have gradually died out in the islands since the abolition of slavery, although the plant still grew well. He added:

“The culture of coffee is also worthy of notice. Like cotton, its cultivation had once been more extensive than it is at present. Marks of what had been plantations, were found in almost every ravine where the soil was suitable for the plant.”<sup>41</sup>

The roots of the rural decay on which the visitors commented actually reach back to the period preceding emancipation. As we saw in chapter 2, the cotton culture in the Seychelles was adversely affected by the competition of United States-grown cotton in the European market. The declining cotton exports of the islands and the vigorous expansion of the lucrative sugar industry of Mauritius led to a heavy drain of capital and labor from the former place to the latter. C. A. Mylius, who assumed office as the first civil commissioner of the Seychelles in April 1839, stressed the impact of the labor drain in the following manner:

The serious and objectionable extensive exportation of Slaves and subsequently of mechanics, servants, and Praedial attached apprentices, from this Colony to the Mauritius has deeply injured the agriculture of the Colony in general and has been the principal cause of many fine plantations being actually abandoned, and the culture of [all] all kinds of produce to which it is so well adapted have [sic] been totally neglected.<sup>42</sup>

The emancipation of the serfs and their exodus from the plantations aggravated the agricultural distress. Reduced production and declining exports affected the revenues adversely. Between October 1, 1833, and September 30, 1838, the revenues amounted to only £4,406 1s. 6d., while the expenditures amounted to £15,017 8s. 10-3/4d. The deficit was made up by an annual subsidy of some £2,000 from the Mauritius treasury. The deficits became larger in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>43</sup>

The economic distress was not relieved by the dependent status and distance of the islands. While the Seychelles complained of the “hardships” they endured by being required to export and import important commodities through the Mauritius customhouse,<sup>44</sup> the members of the Council of Government in Mauritius resented what they called the “unfair burden” of subsidizing improvements in

the Seychelles. On June 3, 1862, for example, Governor Stevenson (1857-63) asked for an advance of £800 to cover the cost of hiring laborers as well as the purchase of few buildings for the accommodation of the police and for the offices of port and harbor departments. The advance was to be repaid by a levy of additional duties on the spirits imported into the Seychelles. Stevenson's request triggered the following response from the finance committee of the council: "Your committee have on several occasions, but especially in their Report on the Estimates of 1850, urged upon the Government the necessity of devising some scheme for making the Seychelles Islands maintain their own establishments, or that the Colony be relieved from so onerous a charge. To these representations little or no attention has been paid . . . ." The committee warned that, unless "immediate" steps were taken to balance the budget of the Seychelles, "it will then, in the opinion of your Committee, be incumbent on the Government to represent to the Secretary of State, in the strongest terms, the injustice of allowing a distant Dependency like that of Seychelles, from which we derive little or no advantages, continuing any longer a burthen on Mauritius."<sup>45</sup> Stevenson's request was granted with reluctance. The prevailing view—a view that underestimated Seychelles' contributions to the revenue of Mauritius in the form of duties on reexports to the Seychelles—that the Seychelles were a burden on Mauritius was partly responsible for the failure of the government to make serious attempts to aid Seychellois planters. Whereas planters in the colonial "mother country" had the assistance of cheap Indian labor, planters in the Seychelles were left to fend for themselves until the early 1860s, when official approval was given to the immigration of Indians into, and the settlement of recaptives in, the islands.

In the meantime planters in the Seychelles made their own adjustments to the labor problems. From about 1835 onward there was a gradual shift of emphasis from the production of the old export staples and self-sufficiency in foodstuffs to the cultivation



of export crops requiring relatively less labor and dependence on food imports. The coconut, vanilla and cinnamon lent themselves to the new phase in Seychelles' agricultural development. By the 1850s, the planting of coconuts was being extended, and by 1862 there was a considerable dependency on the export of coconut oil.<sup>46</sup> A temporary setback occurred as a result of the disastrous hurricane that hit the Seychelles on October 11 and 12, 1862, ravaged the plantations and nearly destroyed the chief town of Mahé island.<sup>47</sup> Luckily, the hurricane spared the largest and most prolific of the coconut plantations, destroying only those which, according to Civil Commissioner Swinburne Ward, were of "small value and chiefly composed of old trees so thickly planted that they could not thrive properly." The owners of the smaller plantations suffered severe losses, but Ward was of the opinion that the destruction of the hurricane might be a blessing in the long run, for the remaining trees would have room to grow properly and yield better crops.<sup>48</sup>

The cultivation of vanilla began in 1866. It was grown on the sharecropping or "moiety system." The first crop was exported in 1877 but it amounted to only 110 lbs. It was not until the period 1890-1903 that the Seychelles attained preeminence in the export of the crop, exporting, according to J. F. G. Lionnet, "more vanilla than all the other British colonies put together." Thereafter, however, there was a decline in the output because of disease and the advent of cheaper synthetic vanilla.<sup>49</sup> The cultivation of tobacco was encouraged by a drop in the volume of United States-grown tobacco exported to eastern Africa during the U.S. civil war. The end of the war and the inferior quality of Seychelles' tobacco, however, caused a decline in the demand for Seychelles' tobacco.<sup>50</sup>

There were other cash crops, but none rivaled the coconut as the mainstay of the economy of the Seychelles. In 1865 the total value of the exports of the islands amounted to £27,313, the coconut accounting for £20,133 of the total. The export of vacoa bags

accounted for only £3,594 of the total.<sup>51</sup> The dominance of the coconut in the economy was well established by 1876, as the following report indicates:

The exports for the year are estimated at 44,255£. Os. 7d., an increase, deducting specie (3,914£. 12s.), of 11,405£. 8s. 11d. over last year. In no previous year were the exports so heavy. The increase is due to the larger quantity shipped of the usual produce as well as to the greater value, and to cocoa-nut fibre. The export trade should progress steadily every year for some time to come.<sup>52</sup>

The cultivation of the "usual produce" and of other crops was aided by the "settlement" of recaptives on the islands. In a minute communicated to the legislature in June 1862, Governor Stevenson had expressed hope that the sanction of Indian immigration into, and the landing of "an occasional prize of captured Africans" on, the islands would be the means of resuscitating the economy of the Seychelles.<sup>53</sup> As things turned out, however, it was the occasional landings of the slaves recaptured from the slave traders on the high seas, and not Indian immigration, that proved to be of immense help to the Seychellois planters. Indian immigration never amounted to much until late in the nineteenth century.

The first recaptives, or "liberated Africans" as they were also called, were landed in the Seychelles in June 1861 by H.M.S. *Lyra* and numbered almost 200. In the same year H.M.S. *Gorgon* landed about sixty. The manner of "settling" them has been described by Devereux:

Directly these are landed they are ticketed and numbered; the males separated from the females; shortly, a day is named for their distribution; we attend, and see our chubby little Topsy's separated; appointed to different families, who undertake to bring them up in the way they should go, also to pay them certain fixed wages; thus all are divided amongst the inhabitants.<sup>54</sup>

The planters paid the government fees to cover the cost of "recruiting" the recaptives assigned to them. Sometimes the costs of "recruiting" the supposedly liberated Africans were high, as

Archdeacon Stephen Hobbs of the C.M.S. mission in Mauritius explained after visiting the Seychelles in 1869:

About 180 were brought here last month [April] by the "Nymphe," & all are already disposed of the inhabitants readily paying 30/- a head to reimburse the Government for clothing & provisions, & other expenses incurred for their account on their arrival. The last importation before this was on of nearly 300 brought by the "Daphne" in December last, who had to be kept 80 days in quarantine, & being in consequence both more expensive, & also less able-bodied, were not applied for so readily.<sup>55</sup>

Altogether, 2,667 recaptives were landed in the Seychelles before their "settlement" was discontinued in 1875. Of the total, 2,254 were alive in 1878.<sup>56</sup>

The exploitation of recaptive labor was a subject of considerable controversy among contemporary European visitors and residents. The controversy did not concern the length of service (five years) nor the rate of pay, which was stationary.<sup>57</sup> The disputed point was whether or not the recaptives were treated fairly. Swinburne Ward touched off the controversy when he stated, in his report on the Seychelles for the year 1863, that the Seychellois planters were, in many instances, undeserving of the assistance given to them in the form of recaptive labor. He said that many of the recaptives were "anxious to return to Zanzibar, preferring Arab to creole masters." Although he admitted that the labor question was "upon a more satisfactory footing" in 1863 than ever before, he counseled against further landings of the recaptives.<sup>58</sup> The advice was not heeded for obvious reasons.

After paying their dues for freedom, the recaptives generally refused to sign long contracts to work for the planters. Some critics, such as the Anglican missionary Rev. Thomas H. Sparshott and Bishop W. G. Tozer of the Universities Mission to Central Africa, held the view that the reason for their refusal was the ill treatment that they received and the fact that the planters would not pay them higher wages if freshly arrived recaptives were available.<sup>59</sup> Sparshott strongly advocated the discontinuation of further



landings of recaptives in the Seychelles so that "the Negro though nominally emancipated might no longer be able to say":

Forced from home, and all its pleasures  
Africa's Coast I left forlorn  
To increase a strangers treasures  
O'er the raging bellows borne.<sup>60</sup>

In 1871 the Anglican Bishop of Mauritius expressed the view that ill-treatment was not a factor in the refusal of the recaptives whose time of compulsory service had expired to reengage to work for their former masters. He was convinced that the cause of the refusal was "laziness."<sup>61</sup>

By 1874 there were, apparently, some improvements in the conditions of the recaptives. After visiting the Seychelles in that year, P. S. Royston, Anglican Bishop of Mauritius, wrote that, since Sparshott and Bishop Tozer were in the islands, "a good deal has been done to ameliorate the outward circumstances of the older ex-African [apprentice] population. They appeared to me well housed, & comfortably provided for in everything except the 'one thing needful.'"<sup>62</sup> Another observer, Captain Prideaux, Acting British Consul-General and Diplomatic Agent in Zanzibar in 1874-75, shared Royston's sentiments in general, but he was also convinced that Britain had short-changed the recaptives of the Seychelles, particularly the young ones, with respect to the provision of adequate care and opportunities for personal and intellectual growth.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps the most stringent criticism came from the pen of Reverend W. B. Chancellor, the Anglican missionary in charge of the C.M.S. educational work among the recaptives. In one of the letters he wrote to his home headquarters in 1875, he said:

French planters and Mauritian Creoles, half French, have been allowed, to bully the Africans as it suited them. What with curtailed wages, stinted rations, insufficient clothing, bad houses, an excess of work and maltreatment, the African has been compelled to lie, to steal, to attempt murder and to run away from his hard taskmaster. The Creoles then point and say, "How is it possible to humanize such

animals?" My answer is, "By being human towards them." Why, Sir, an African can't gain a case in Court; I don't believe there is one on record in which the Mozambique got the better of his Master, even when he was in the right. In fact there are some people here who think an African ought not to be allowed an advocate in Court.<sup>64</sup>

In the light of the reforms introduced in 1875, it would appear that the picture of exploitation drawn by the "sad-eyed" critics was not an inaccurate one. Underpaid recaptive labor was certainly one of the reasons why the "time-expired" recaptives would not renew their "contracts," a situation that encouraged a certain amount of instability in labor turnover. On leaving their assigned masters, the recaptives worked as sharecroppers or as cultivators of land for the rent of which they paid with their labor. Because the system involved the sharing of produce or labor, it was known as the "moiety system" or "half system." The system probably suited the needs of the impoverished landowners with little capital, but it did not meet the labor needs of the more substantial planters. To meet the needs of the latter as well as to make labor more ample generally, the colonial authorities resorted to various expedients to "encourage" people to work as wage earners.

The most important of the measures was the enforcement of the Vagrancy Act. A modified application of it in the 1860s was aimed at those whom Swinburne Ward called "dissolute idlers." The "dissolute idlers" consisted of those living in overcrowded huts, located in very close proximity to the large plantations, who "refused" to work and had no "visible" means of earning a living. These people were suspected of organizing or abetting the robberies perpetrated on their richer neighbours. The Vagrancy Act was also designed to convert underemployed peasant cultivators into more "useful" wage earners.<sup>65</sup> The hands of the authorities were further strengthened by a regulation passed in 1874 (No. 9) to discourage "squatting." The regulation was apparently working well in 1875, for Chief Civil Commissioner C. S. Salmon reported that "many of the squatters have sought the labour market where they were much wanted, and where the means

of obtaining a respectable living is within reach of a moderate industry.' But Salmon also added: "It will take time, however, to eradicate a system that had become part of the social life of this place."<sup>66</sup>

The strong desire of the lower classes for economic independence was partly responsible for a move toward a "new deal" for workers. Regulation No. 9 of 1874 was repealed in 1875. Squatting as such was no longer attacked, but fresh measures were aimed "distinctly at bringing within the range of taxation the idle squatter, and exempting the labourer and mechanic under contract of service before a magistrate." The new measures also gave summary jurisdiction to the wardens to imprison "squatters" for nonpayment of the tax.<sup>67</sup> It is not clear how well the "tax incentive" to labor worked! In the same year the Board of Civil Commissioners, created in 1872 to give the Seychelles some measure of financial autonomy and a greater sense of "local self-government,"<sup>68</sup> passed a number of regulations for improving the working conditions of the recaptives.

The regulations of 1875 required every planter to provide proper accommodation for recaptive women *en ceinte* (in confinement). Every planter was required to keep a record of the rations, wages and clothes given to the Africans allotted to him and to make the record available for the inspection of the official known as the Inspector of Africans. The wages of those who were too young to manage their pay were to be invested in a bank under the supervision of the Inspector of Africans. The latter was empowered to prosecute complaints made by the recaptives against their masters without charge to the plaintiffs. Lastly, it was laid down that the Inspector of Africans was to exercise "the same powers of inspection over private dwelling houses and premises as he had over estates . . . ." <sup>69</sup> The regulations were superseded by the labor law passed in 1878, which took effect in both Mauritius and the Seychelles on January 1 of the following year.

The new labor law promised to protect the interests of agricultural workers and to forge a more harmonious nexus between the



planters and their employees, but the memories of past, strained master-servant relationships lingered on.

### **The Freedmen**

When the freedmen left their former masters, they scattered to the different parts of the colony and its major dependency in search of new homes and new means of livelihood. Their choice of settlement and occupation depended on the skills that they had acquired during the days of slavery, the prevailing system of landholding, and their desire for unfettered freedom. Since most of them were agriculturists, the availability of land was a crucial factor in the selection of places to build homes and forge new communities. Because the colonial laws and the Emancipation Act had confirmed the planters in their possession of the choicest lands, and because of their desire to free themselves from restrictive contacts with their erstwhile lords, many freedmen sought "vacant" lands in the remote forests, mountain slopes, and valleys. At first they "squatted" on the lands and erected their huts. By 1845, however, many of them had become cultivators of leased, rented, or purchased land, varying in size from one to ten acres.<sup>70</sup> They grew root crops, grains and vegetables; some kept poultry in addition. Some of them became sharecroppers, while others preferred to work as laborers from month to month. The independent and semi-independent cultivators formed the majority of the colonial peasantry. Some of the freedmen settled on the seashore as fishermen; a sizable number of them, particularly in Mauritius, plied their trades as masons, carpenters and smiths. Other freedmen were attracted to domestic service, hawking, shopkeeping and government service. In Mauritius a large number of the freedmen flocked to Port Louis, where they worked as porters at the wharf and in the market.

Their patterns of settlement varied. Those who flocked to Port Louis lived in Black Town, the suburb customarily reserved for

people of African descent. Their influx aggravated problems of overcrowding. In the 1850s Black Town was described by Reverend Patrick Beaton, a British missionary working in Mauritius, as composed of "miserable-looking huts, extending along the base of the signal mountain . . . ." <sup>71</sup> By the late 1860s living conditions in Black Town had become worse. The superintendent of public schools, who toured the area, left the following description: "Some of the houses are literally found to teem with life—in huts not more than 12 feet square whole families consisting of eight persons or even more manage to exist." <sup>72</sup> There were no provisions for drainage or ventilation in many of the huts. The area as a whole became veritable breeding grounds of disease, and many dwellers were swept away by epidemics and hurricanes, such as those of 1867 and 1868. Owing to the danger that those living in the area, particularly on the higher ground, posed to the health of Port Louis, and because of the fact that many of the occupants of the huts did not pay ground rent to the government, the Board of Health decided to reduce the "squattling" population. <sup>73</sup> The removal of the squatters was underway in 1869. In 1870 the surveyor-general stated that "all huts untenanted, either by the decease of the occupiers, or being abandoned, were seized and destroyed." Seventy-nine out of the 523 huts standing in Black Town in 1870 were razed. "In addition to these," the Board of Health reported, "there were other huts on War Department land, which he [the surveyor-general] understood were dealt with in the same way by the Military Authorities." <sup>74</sup>

Unlike their brethren in the congested parts of Port Louis, the ex-slaves who settled as peasants had ampler room. They lived in small bands and in huts nestled among trees and planted crops. The huts of the black peasants in the Seychelles, particularly those on Mahé island, were reportedly more substantial than those of their kinsmen in Mauritius. After his first visit to the Seychelles in 1856, Vincent W. Ryan, Anglican Bishop of Mauritius, wrote the following description of the layout of the huts owned by one of the blacks in the vicinity of Port Victoria:

A Negro was standing near one of them [the huts], of which the arrangements were really admirable. About twenty feet from the cabin in which he lived was the kitchen cabin, with all his implements for cooking. Near this was a pig-stye, with two pigs in it; not far off a poulaillier, or enclosed place for fowls, out of which a goodly number came to feed; and a few paces further a clear well of water, at the foot of a small rock, on which a moveable stone was placed. The dwelling had a low verandah and two apartments.<sup>75</sup>

In the new communities the ex-slaves tried to recapture as much as possible aspects of the culture of their ancestral lands. The family as a socioeconomic unit became more stabilized than before. In Mauritius, owing to the increasing influence of the missionaries, marriages among blacks were increasingly "solemnized," whereas in the Seychelles, where missionary influence was minimal during the greater part of the nineteenth century, customary forms of marriage persisted. According to William Chancellor, "concubinage" and polygamy were practiced to a great extent among the Africans of the Seychelles in the 1870s.<sup>76</sup> Where it was feasible, particularly in Mauritius, the male spouses became the principal wage earners or providers for the needs of their families, while their wives stayed at home to take care of their children or to do contracted work, such as washing, in their homes. The labor-hungry planters did not look with favor on this display of "idleness" on the part of the black women. They could not understand the reason why the former female slaves, who supposedly had no love for their offspring, should prefer domestic duties in their own houses to working in the sugar fields owned by the white or "near-white" planters!<sup>77</sup>

In both Mauritius and the Seychelles, communal ties, kinship obligations, hospitality, conviviality and respect for elders were encouraged as desirable values. A few illustrations will suffice. Between 1835 and 1846, the population of the ex-"apprentices" of Mauritius declined from about 61,000 to a little below 50,000.<sup>78</sup> Between 1846 and 1851 their population declined further by about 1,035, while the "general population" increased by about 1,349. In 1861 P. B. Ayres, General Inspector of Health, estimated that



the ex-“apprentice” population fell by 6,533 during the preceding decade.<sup>79</sup> The decline was due in part to the ravages of such diseases as smallpox in the 1830s and 1840s and to epidemics of cholera in 1854, 1856 and 1861. The chief victims were the aged freedmen and those who supposedly did not work hard enough to save for lean years. Even though nothing was done officially to help the freedmen to start new lives after their emancipation, an official report made in 1846 confidently stated: “The emancipated Negroes have advanced in years, and there is a large number who have fallen in discrepitude, and through want of foresight and thrift, have become wholly dependent upon their relations and friends, who are generally ill able to supply them with proper medical attendance, and the comforts required in sickness.”<sup>80</sup> The important point to note here is the emphasis the freedmen placed on shared relative abundance and poverty. Other reports attributed the relatively high death rate among blacks to their reliance on “folk” medicine and their failure to seek timely relief from illness in the civil hospital at Port Louis. As it was reported, those who were sick sought relief at the hospital only when “the patience or means of their friends and relations are exhausted.” Since help was sought too late, there was a high death rate among those admitted to the hospital.<sup>81</sup> The blacks’ dread of the civil hospital was probably due to ignorance and irrational fear, but it was also related to the comfort that the blacks derived from being with their trusted kith and kin in sickness and in health—another indication of their “clannishness”!

If the reports of contemporary European residents of Mauritius are correct, the first few years after emancipation were marked by frequent nightly reunions among the ex-slaves for dancing and merriment. We are also told that the evening reunions had diminished by the 1850s.<sup>82</sup> Since the blacks like those in Africa, were reputedly fond of music and dance, the reunions must have continued, albeit infrequently. Nightly meetings for music, dancing and drinking certainly continued in the Seychelles, a practice not looked upon favorably by the tiny colonial establishment in

Mahé. Salmon described this "irritating" practice as follows:

There being no legal restriction on the making of this pernicious drink ["bacca," which the blacks brewed from sugar cane and pineapple], notwithstanding the efforts of the Board of Civil Commissioners to impose one, the population gets debauched and ruined, physically and morally, to an extent that is not believed by those unable to see and judge themselves. The drunken orgies nightly held (in private premises) when men and women, boys and girls, dance together with open indecency, the after effects and consequences of intoxication carried to fury point, and, in fact, all the results of the worst of social evils have been known for some time at Seychelles, and such efforts as can be made by the Board of Civil Commissioners have not been wanting to overcome this evil.<sup>83</sup>

Because the "drunken" blacks were careful to hold their integrated drinking and "indecent" dances in private places, they generally escaped the punishment of the law-enforcement officers.

Perhaps the most baffling of the values cherished by the freedmen was their work ethics. It was baffling in the sense that the colonial authorities and the planters could not understand why the blacks were seemingly contented with little and preferred working for themselves at their own pace, even if the work yielded meager material returns, to working for white employers at rates of wages and tempo of work set by the employers. This "failing" on the blacks' part and their apparent addiction to the pursuit of inordinate leisure were the subject of frequent comments by the colonial officials. In 1840s C. Anderson commented on the preference of the freedmen for "spell work" or "target work": many of them would engage themselves "for a few days at a time" in work requiring great physical exertion, such as the loading and discharging of ships, to obtain enough money to live on in "idleness" for a month. He added that "that mode of life is much more congenial to their health, habits, and dispositions than the unceasing labour, and the monotonous routine of sugar plantation."<sup>84</sup>

"Fitful labour" persisted long after the novelty of freedom had worn off. In 1845, in response to the expressed desire of the secretary of state for the colonies to get information on how the



freedmen were living, inquiries—some perfunctory, others genuine—were conducted in the several districts of Mauritius. Some of the reports submitted by the stipendiary magistrates and the civil magistrates were ample; others were sketchy. Stipendiary Magistrate J. Regnard reported that the black peasants worked “little” and “irregularly” and that they contented themselves with the small produce they raised from their land “under their present inferior and careless method of cultivation . . . .” For the peasants, “progress” stopped on the attainment of the proprietorship of small plots of land. The mechanics, masons and carpenters worked more steadily and obtained higher wages, and the domestics generally earned high wages, which they spent on ostentatious dressing. “It is not rare,” he said, “to meet many of this class dressed in a style far above what their station in life can warrant.” Summing up the general attitude of the blacks toward work and leisure, he said: “The most conspicuous failing of the Negro population in general is idleness, and aversion to regular labour or other employment. They live poorly, and content themselves with little, because they prefer that mode of life which requires the least amount of regular labour.”<sup>85</sup>

Most of the other reports expressed views similar to those of Regnard. The few exceptions were the reports from Savanne and Grand Port districts. In the former the blacks were said to be “generally of good character, laborious, quiet, humane and hospitable,” their weakness being “cohabitation” with women of their race.<sup>86</sup> In the latter district the blacks were described as hard working and aware of the importance of capital accumulation. Stipendiary Magistrate J. Davidson paid them the following tribute:

I may . . . add one more fact of the good feeling prevailing amongst this class, and that is, having proposed to build a public hospital for the district by general subscription, they immediately saw the benefit it would be to all, and came forward and subscribed liberally, according to their means, from 1s. to 1£. sterling, and I have at this moment in my office a list, bearing 977 of their names as subscribers to that institution.<sup>87</sup>



Summing up the reports, Governor William M. Gomm (1842-49) described the blacks as not belonging to the "stirring or ambitious" section of the society.<sup>88</sup>

"Fitful exertion" and apparent improvidence were also said to be the characteristic attitudes of the blacks of the Seychelles toward work and leisure. As Salmon explained, the black earned less because he worked less, but "he is free from routine and control, and gets enough food." If he had taxes to pay, or wanted cash, he worked for a "spell" for someone who paid cash. "In all these matters," he added, "the African follows the Creole labourer, he takes to the life he is placed among. The status of one cannot be distinguished outwardly from the other, both have the same habits of life."<sup>89</sup>

Because of the freedmen's view of work and leisure and the inequities in the distribution of wealth in the days of slavery and serfdom, the ex-slaves as a whole were short of material means for survival. Unlike their "coloured" brethren, whose part-white ancestry endowed them with some property, and whose freer status and education gave them opportunities in government jobs and the professions, the freedmen were lucky when they managed to keep body and soul together. Indigency was rife among them. Some of the freedmen of Mauritius were so destitute that they were glad to receive occasional doles no matter how small they were. The occasional relief did not come from their erstwhile masters, who had no economic interest in supporting those who "deserted" them when they were in dire need of cheap labor in the immediate post-emancipation years. Rather, the relief came from a few missionaries seeking souls to conquer for Christ, such as Reverend Le Brun, Père Laval (Le Brun's Catholic counterpart), and Mother Augustine, a young Mauritian lady who founded the Society of Sisters of Charity in 1850.<sup>90</sup> In the 1850s the benefactors were joined by Bishop Ryan, who wrote home in August 1857 that he had enrolled six destitute ex-slaves "as *pensioners* at a dollar a month, having previously ascertained their characters & circumstances from our Catechist in the district . . . ." One of the

“pensioners” was said to have been about seventy-three years old, with “a most mild & expressive countenance,” and to have originated near a great lake in Africa about a month’s journey from the sea.<sup>91</sup> He came, presumably, from Lake Malawi area.

If the conditions of the freedmen were bad in Mauritius during the first two decades following emancipation, they were worse in the Seychelles, where economic recession combined with the subcolonial status of the archipelago to heighten general distress, with the blacks as the worst sufferers. The dependent status and distance of the islands made them a “dumping ground” for inferior and costly reexported goods from Mauritius.<sup>92</sup> Employers paid their workers partly in the high-priced imported goods because of the relative scarcity of specie; the result was a further discouragement of labor, which in turn affected production. The peoples of the Seychelles also suffered from neglect, such as lack of medical and health facilities, a problem to which Mylius addressed himself soon after assuming office. In his letter of April 10, 1839, addressed to the colonial government in Mauritius, he asked for resources to build a good road, two churches, two schools at Mahé and a school each at Praslin, Silhouette, and La Digne. He added the following:

I have to beg also for the establishing of a Civil Hospital at Mahé and a Dispensary on the Islands of Praslin, Silhouette and La Digne for furnishing medicine and medical attendance to the poor gratuitously. Many an unfortunate individual in these Islands has fallen a victim to disease from the total want of medicine and absence of a medical man.<sup>93</sup>

Lack of funds delayed meaningful improvements.

The conditions of the freedmen improved somewhat in the 1860s, as the following remark by Governor Henry Barkly (1863-70) indicates: “The good prices and numerous markets for vegetables opened in every direction probably induces [sic] them to cultivate their provision grounds better than they would otherwise have done, and they are thus useful to a certain extent, though adding little, in proportion to their numbers, to the exportable



produce and wealth of the Colony.''<sup>94</sup> In the Seychelles the resuscitation of agriculture and the liberation of trade authorized by the Order in Council of November 20, 1865, yielded some good fruits by the 1870s. The liberation of trade enabled the Seychelles to import more merchandise at cheaper prices directly from Europe, particularly from England and France.<sup>95</sup> The profits of the enterprise of the more well-to-do inhabitants, which probably filtered into the pockets of the peasants and laborers, could buy more than before.

By the 1860s also, the freedmen were taking advantage of the facilities for literary education that expanded in the post-emancipation period. In July 1836, during one of the hearings of the Select Committee of the British Parliament on Negro "apprenticeship" in the British colonies, abolitionist Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton asked Sir George Grey questions on the state of literacy among the Negro population of Mauritius. Responding, Grey said that only ten Negroes out of an estimated population of 70,000 were reportedly able to read and write.<sup>96</sup> The estimated number of those who could read was very small, in view of the fact that several score slave children received instructions in the catechism and in reading and writing on the estates of Charles Telfair. Grey's response, however, illustrates the mass illiteracy that existed among the slaves at the beginning of the "apprenticeship" period. The literary rate improved thereafter.

The education of the freedmen was aided by the Mico Charity, a philanthropic institution established in July 1835 to promote Negro education in the colonies. In November the trustees sent a pastor to Jamaica to head an establishment of nine persons. In Mauritius the supervision of the institution's educational work was entrusted to Reverend Le Brun on February 24, 1836. Le Brun's services were available because the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) for which he worked had decided in 1833 to suspend L.M.S. work in Mauritius as a result of limited funds and because of brighter prospects elsewhere.<sup>97</sup> The L.M.S. resumed its work in Mauritius in 1841 and reappointed Le Brun as its agent. In the meantime Le



Brun had managed to support his curtailed missionary work in 1835 with the aid of a grant of five pounds sterling a month from the Mauritius government, but the grant was discontinued in 1836.<sup>98</sup> A few months after Le Brun's appointment, the trustees of the Mico Charity engaged two teachers, George Clark and Philip Ollivier, to go to Mauritius to work with Le Brun. They sailed for Mauritius in May 1836. In addition to its own funds, the trustees received small grants from the paltry sum of £20,000 and £5,000, which the British Parliament voted respectively as aid in the erection of elementary school houses and normal schools for the training of teachers. The amounts allocated for expenditure in Mauritius under these two heads were £800 and £780. The trustees were required to match the funds with their own money.<sup>99</sup>

The first Mico Charity schools in Mauritius were opened at Port Louis and Grand Port in 1836. Four more were opened in the following year, bringing the total to six.<sup>100</sup> The enrollment in the schools was under 420 children. Most of the pupils were "coloured" boys and girls, but a considerable number of them were the children of "apprentices." Le Brun had planned to open additional schools in 1838, but lack of funds for hiring school premises and the difficulty of obtaining teachers hampered the extension work.<sup>101</sup> The planters and colonial civil servants did not seem to have cared much, if they cared at all, about the schools. For example, the school at Mahébourg was said in 1838 to have been visited by only one military officer who "stepped in" the building a few times.<sup>102</sup>

The number of schools increased slightly after 1838. In 1845 there were nine schools, attended by 670 pupils and operated at a cost of £1,785.<sup>103</sup> The proportion of the children of the freedmen in the total enrollment is not known. According to J. Davidson, the freedmen of Grand Port, who lived near schools, took advantage of the schools for the education of their children, whom they brought up "from an early age" to assist them in their work.<sup>104</sup> In Pamplemousses some of the adult freedmen were reported in 1845 to be attending adult classes in order to learn how to read and write.<sup>105</sup>

Such persons would not fail to enroll their children in elementary schools. For the whole black population, however, the proportion of children of school age attending school was very low.

The inception of the Mico Charity schools helped to stimulate the interest of the colonial administration in the education of the lower classes. In June 1837 Governor Nicolay asked the landed gentry to take an active interest in the establishment of schools. He said that the government would recommend to the legislature to authorize "a reasonable sum to be granted annually as salary for the teacher, whenever a proper public school house and residence for the master, were provided."<sup>106</sup> On August 11 the Council of Government resolved that a school system under the direction of the government was "not only expedient, but essentially necessary for the diffusion of instruction among the labouring classes particularly among the children of the apprentice population, independently of the schools that may be established in the Colony by the Mico Charity, or by any other private association."<sup>107</sup>

Nicolay's plan was spelled out in July 1839. He proposed the building of a normal school and an elementary school at Port Louis, and at least one school in each of the eight districts. The schools would be open to the children of all classes; no particular religious creed would be taught in them, but religious instruction "common to all Christians, including short morning and evening prayers," would be permitted.<sup>108</sup> The Council of Government approved the plan and passed an ordinance authorizing the governor to establish an education committee to replace the Committee of Public Instruction. At first, the secretary of state for the colonies proposed that the government could regard the Mico Charity schools as public schools, but he gave his approval to the plan.<sup>109</sup> On July 1, 1840, the education committee was established and charged with supervising government schools.

The launching of the government program was facilitated by the phasing out of the parliamentary grant for the Mico Charity schools. On April 5, 1841, the secretary of state informed the governor that the parliamentary grant for Negro education would



cease in five years with an annual reduction of one-fifth to begin in 1842. On March 8, 1842, the education committee recommended government takeover of the Mico Charity schools. The Council of Government approved the recommendation and it was endorsed by the secretary of state.<sup>110</sup> In 1843 there were five government schools in Port Louis, one in Pamplemousses, and one in Grand River South East, with a total enrollment of 545 children (353 boys and 192 girls). The total enrollment in the Mico Charity schools was 632, while that in the four schools of the L.M.S.—four in Port Louis and one in the “country”—was 375.<sup>111</sup> Figures for the enrollment in the Catholic schools are not available, but the Catholic schools usually had the largest school population. The Church of England entered into competition with the Catholic mission in the 1850s, but the increase in the number of schools did not make any significant dent in the rate of illiteracy among all classes in the society, particularly among the blacks. The blacks were in better position than the Indians, the education of whom was neglected and was rendered more difficult by the diversity of the dialects spoken among the Indians and their dispersal throughout the estates.<sup>112</sup>

The high rate of illiteracy was tackled in three ways. In 1856 the colonial government passed an ordinance authorizing the grant of small sums of money to approved schools. In 1857 there were seven assisted schools with an enrollment of 298; in the following year the number of assisted schools rose to twenty-one, eight of which were Indian schools. The total enrollment in the twenty-one schools was 878 children, of whom 206 were Indians.<sup>113</sup> In July 1857 the government enacted a compulsory education ordinance for reasons that Higginson summarized as follows: (1) Many thousands of the inhabitants of Mauritius were in a state of “moral and intellectual destitution.” (2) “The immovable apathy of parents, the general indifference of employers, the value of child labor to both, and the peculiar and abnormal condition of our heterogeneous population, present a combination of obstacles which, to my



**Table 8**  
**Expenditures on "Establishments"**  
**(In pounds, omitting fractions)<sup>119</sup>**

	1857	1866	1871
Ecclesiastical	5,675	8,776	7,846
Education	8,490	16,556	16,766
Medical	6,784	14,054	11,919
Police and Jails	26,691	53,829	57,810
Aggregate Expenditures	381,780	700,048	600,961

apprehension [only] compulsion can effectually overcome."<sup>114</sup> Although compulsory education was not achieved, the government extended its own schools and encouraged the various missionary societies working in Mauritius to expand their educational work.

As a result of the efforts, the average enrollments in government schools in the years 1874, 1875 and 1876 were 5,276, 5,452 and 5,358 respectively. During the same period the numbers of children attending grant-aided schools were 2,734, 3,156 and 3,398 respectively. In 1876 the government spent £12,412 on its own schools, at an average cost of £2 6s. 4d. per pupil. The amount provided for grant-in-aid totaled £4,000. Of this sum, £2,704 was spent on thirty Catholic schools, twelve C.M.S. schools, and two independent schools, at an average cost of 15s. 11d. per pupil.<sup>115</sup>

The expansion of the educational programs was hampered by several factors. Besides the problems stated above, there was a grave shortage of well-trained and highly dedicated teachers, partly as a result of the poor salaries paid to teachers and the low esteem in which junior teachers were held in the society at large.<sup>116</sup> Because of the acute shortage of local staff, most of the teachers employed in the government schools were Britons. To reduce dependence on expatriate staff, a normal school was established, which the government hoped would "ere long . . . render us inde-

**Table 9**  
**Expenditures on Services Exclusive of "Establishments"**  
**(In pounds omitting fractions)**

	1857	1866	1871
Ecclesiastical	1,383	2,499	2,364
Education	2,941	7,458	4,632
Hospitals	3,429	12,096	6,560
Police and Jails	3,662	2,277	7,589
Aggregate Expenditures	235,222	442,867	365,018

pendent of assistance from without."<sup>117</sup> Besides the shortage of well-qualified teachers, there was a shortage of books and other needed equipment for the schools.<sup>118</sup>

Finally, there was the problem of the niggardliness of the colonial government with regard to expenditure of public money on education. Despite its professed interest, the government gave low priority to the education of the youth; in fact, it spent more money on the police and jails than it spent on education. Tables 8 and 9 illustrate the government's ordering of priorities.

The number of blacks who benefited from the expanded educational programs is not known. A report in 1847 stated that "the great and universal ambition" of the children of the freedmen was to become clerks, shopboys, or artisans.<sup>120</sup> We do not know how many blacks realized this ambition, but Governor Barkly provides some indication in the remark he made on July 26, 1866:

Many of those of mixed race belonging to the labouring classes, and not a few of the children of former slaves, have profited [from the expanded opportunities for education] to qualify themselves for employment as overseers, clerks, tradesmen, artizans, and mechanics, and contrive to hold their own notwithstanding the competition of those of Indian birth.<sup>121</sup>

It does not appear that the children of the ex-slaves had higher education. If they had, the governor would have mentioned it in his remark.

The emancipated blacks of the Seychelles were also introduced

to literary education in the post-emancipation period. Unlike the situation in Mauritius, where the colonial government owned and maintained some schools, education in the Seychelles was for many decades associated with the evangelizing efforts of missionary societies. It was not until 1891 that the government opened a free primary school and a fee-paying secondary school for boys. A Mico Charity school probably existed in the Seychelles from 1840 to 1842. From the 1850s onwards, the rivalries of the Catholic and Anglican missions resulted in the establishment of educational facilities. The foundation of Catholic schools in the islands were laid in 1861 with the arrival of three sisters (two French and one Réunionnais) of St. Joseph de Cluny. These "Romish" ladies opened a small orphanage and a boarding school for the children of well-to-do families. In 1867 teaching brothers arrived and helped to increase the number of Catholic schools.<sup>122</sup> From the 1850s onward, the Anglican mission operated schools in connection with its religious program in general and official attempts to anglicize Mauritius and the Seychelles. An Anglican church was consecrated at Port Victoria by Bishop Ryan on May 12, 1859. In 1861 there were fifty-nine boys and sixty-nine girls attending the Anglican school in the town, most of them being children of African ancestry.<sup>123</sup>

In terms of organization, quality of instruction, and numbers of adherents, the Catholic schools seem to have had a strong edge over their competitors. Civil Commissioner Ward described the Protestant schools in 1864 as being "miserably useless . . ."<sup>124</sup> Ten years later another official report stated that the three Anglican schools were in poor condition and poorly managed; on the other hand, the Catholic schools were praised as being better endowed and having more qualified teachers and more zealous managers. In the report on grant-aided schools for the year 1871-72, the respective enrollments in the Catholic and Anglican schools were stated to be 364 and 192 respectively.<sup>125</sup> In one respect, however, the Anglicans gained the upper hand, namely, the education of the recaptives.



After six years of preparatory efforts, which were handicapped by the planters' reluctance to free the young recaptives for the purpose of instruction, the C.M.S. built a school for the recaptives in 1875. The colonial government granted fifty acres of land in the Black Forest, located a few miles from Port Victoria, to aid the society in the operation of a vocational, elementary, and religious school for the benefit of "children of the African race." A nominal ground rent was to be paid annually on the land for ten years; the grant would be renewed for another ten years, after which the government would decide on what terms the concession would be continued. The grant was, however, subject to the right of the government to inspect the school.<sup>126</sup> The establishment was named Venn's Town in honour of Reverend Venn, a prominent figure at the headquarters in London. The school existed until 1889, when the pupils deserted it for the C.M.S. and Catholic schools at Port Victoria.<sup>127</sup>

By 1875 the lot of the freedmen had improved in several respects. Economically, they had overcome the initial problems of forging new lives. Educationally, their children had been introduced to the rudiments of Western education. In other respects, however, they ranked below the whites and "coloureds" but above the Indian laborers who had replaced the blacks as the prop of the plantation industry.

### Colonial Society

In the post-emancipation period, social stratification was based essentially on racial and ethnic division. As in the previous period, the thinnest upper layer consisted of the expatriate colonial officials headed by the governor and a sprinkling of British businessmen, planters, army men and missionaries. Together they constituted the imperial elite. The official segment of the British "establishment" was a world unto itself, socially aloof but occasionally tolerating the cream of the Franco-Mauritian landed gentry. On

ceremonial occasions the British elite and the localized French elite toasted their fortunes and aristocratic solidarity, but their interests and aspirations were generally antagonistic. The old established families among Franco-Mauritians resented Britain's attempts to anglicize Mauritius, symbolized by the reorganization of the Royal College in 1840 with an English rector at its head, the increased importation of Protestant missionaries to challenge the assumed supremacy of the Catholic faith and the ousting of French by English as the official language of the high court as of July 15, 1847. One historian has vividly recalled the great emotion aroused among the French inhabitants by the last event. A young barrister named Célicourt Antelme was defending a case before the high court on July 14 and staged an unsuccessful linguistic filibuster in the following manner:

He prolonged the debate intentionally, so as to carry it to a late hour. While he was finishing his pleading, the clock of the Cathedral near by struck midnight. Then, in a most remarkable speech, he bade good-bye to his mother tongue, causing great emotion in the crowd that had invaded the Court buildings. On leaving the Court he was carried shoulder high and loudly cheered.<sup>128</sup>

The ousting of the French language by English in the high court and the economic recession of the mid 1840s aroused a renewed campaign among the leaders of the Franco-Mauritian community for a greater voice in the governance of the colony. On September 28, 1848, some planters and merchants met in a hotel and formed a committee to consider and report on the best means of "securing a fair and impartial representation of the interests of all classes" in Mauritius "with a view to aid the Home and the Local Governments in the adoption of such measures as the present depressed state of all interests in the Colony imperatively calls for."<sup>129</sup> In October the Merchants and Planters' Association approved the following recommendations made by the committee: (1) Formation of a political "association" by "the public election of its members." (2) Port Louis to be represented in the "association" by twenty members; forty members would represent the rural

districts. (3) The right of election should be enjoyed by all British subjects residing in Mauritius. (4) Voting should be by ballot, each voter paying two dollars or four rupees. (5) Triennial elections of the members of the "association."<sup>130</sup>

The colonial government did not like the indirect demand for an elected representative assembly. Governor Gomm prohibited the formation of an assembly by "general election" as an invasion of royal prerogatives. He expressed, however, his readiness "to submit any application to the consideration of Her Majesty's Government for the endowment of institutions not at present forming part of its constitution . . . ."<sup>131</sup>

The leaders of the "coloured" community favored the idea of a representative government in which the owners or renters of substantial property had a voice. Although they also took pride in their French language and part-French heritage, they did not mind, for tactical reasons, supporting the British in their program of anglicization. Recalling vividly how the "lily-white" Franco-Mauritians had inflicted indignities on them in the past, they declared in their organ, the *Sentinel*, that they were English not only in name, not only in fact, but also in sentiments.<sup>132</sup> With such extravagant claims the leaders of the "coloureds" hoped to spite their arch rivals and at the same time to win a political voice in the colonial government.

The British government had its own reasons for making some political concessions. It was neither the incessant clamor of the "coloureds" for political rights, nor the wounded pride of the Franco-Mauritians that made the British government "broaden" the base of participation in government. It was rather considerations calculated to effect savings in the cost of colonial administration. One concession made by Britain was to make Port Louis a municipality. Lord Grey stated the reasons for the concession as follows:

it is not only by the reduction and consolidation of Offices that an attempt may be made to relieve the Colonial Treasury from charges on account of the Civil Government.



It appears that much of that Government which is elsewhere entrusted to Municipal Corporations, or other Local Authorities, is in Mauritius performed by the officers of the Government, the Expenditure being defrayed from the General Revenue of the Colony, instead of by rates or from some other local revenues.<sup>133</sup>

The municipal charter was published in December 1849 and came into force on January 1, 1850. It provided for a municipal council made up of a mayor, a deputy mayor and thirteen councillors who would be chosen every two years. The qualifications for holding office and for voting favored men of substantial means. To be a councillor a candidate had to own property or land worth at least one thousand pounds sterling. In order to be eligible to vote a person had to own property worth three hundred pounds or yielding an annual revenue of not less than thirty pounds. A person who took out license of not less than twenty pounds a year could also vote. The stiff property qualifications ensured that the elections, which were held in February 1850, returned only the well-to-do whites and "coloureds." With masons earning about two pounds and eight shillings a month in 1849,<sup>134</sup> persons of that class could not hope to become voters. The first mayor was white, but in 1857 a "coloured" leader became mayor.<sup>135</sup>

The second concession made by Britain was more related to the political demands of the whites but it had little effect on the distribution of power. On August 24, 1849, Governor Sir George William Anderson (1849-50) informed the Council of Government that he had been authorized by the secretary of state for the colonies to add three members to the unofficial side of the council.<sup>136</sup> Before leaving office in 1850, Governor Anderson addressed the members of the council on his accomplishments:

This is the last time I shall address you, and I do this with very great regret. It has been my good fortune, under the instructions of the Secretary of State, to have made you independent by increasing the number of unofficial members. It was written to me by a high official authority that if I succeeded in carrying on the Government with this addition to your Council I should have achieved a great triumph. I think I may now congratulate myself in having achieved this triumph.<sup>137</sup>

Anderson's "triumph" was all his. The whites welcomed the slight addition to their ranks but they were well aware of where the locus of power was. It was not until the constitutional reforms of 1886 that they really achieved a large measure of success in the sharing of legislative power with the government. In the meantime the "broadening" of political participation added further points of contacts and interactions between Franco-Mauritians and the "evolved" "coloured" leaders, and increased rivalries among the two groups. Neither the ex-"apprentices" nor the vast majority of the Indian immigrants had the means, the time, or the education to engage in elite politics.

Below the privileged classes were the freedmen and the Indians, the butt of society. The former moved largely in their own circles, rarely interacting in a meaningful way with the upper classes except in the market place and occasionally on the plantations. They generally married within their group. In the Seychelles, where the African factor was still strong, they retained a fairly distinct culture despite a reasonable high degree of creolization. At the bottom of society, in the case of Mauritius, were the Indian workers. Some of their brethren occupied positions analogous to those of the "coloureds" with whom they intermarried. At first the intermingling was rare.<sup>138</sup> Later on, it increased. On the whole, however, the Indians formed a distinct group with great differences among themselves but with elements of a common culture.

By 1875 there were signs that Mauritius and the Seychelles would develop along different lines. In the former, different segments of the colonial society moved in fairly distinct cultural orbits. In the latter, the strong numerical superiority of Africans and the existence of large pockets of poverty among the whites contributed to the slow intermingling of whites and blacks, and the evolution of a fairly homogeneous culture. In spite of these discernible differences, the two "plural" societies were burdened with the heritage of slavery, which placed an undue emphasis on the color of one's skin and which laid great stress on the exploitation of the more numerous "inferior" classes by a dominant minority claiming superior talents and endowments.

### Notes

1. Nicolay's minute, June 28, 1838, C.O. 170/11.
2. Anderson to Lord John Russell, May 1, 1840, C.O. 167/216. After the termination of the "apprenticeship" system, the title of the special magistrates was changed to "stipendiary magistrates." Their duties were now concerned with the administration of master-servant laws and regulations governing immigrant laborers.
3. Nicolay to Glenelg, May 4, 1839, C.O. 167/210.
4. Nicolay's minute, July 20, 1839, communicated to the Council of Government on July 22, Proceedings of the Council of Government, July 22, C.O. 170/12.
5. Edward Baker to Reverend W. Ellis, April 12, 1839, Archives of the Council for Work Mission (London), Box 2, Folder 3, Jacket C.
6. Anderson to Russell, May 1, 1840, C.O. 167/216.
7. Second Report of the Committee on the Shortage of Labour in Mauritius, August 15, 1845, C.O. 170/22.
8. Report of the Committee, appointed on April 20, 1847, on the Emancipated Population, C.O. 170/24.
9. First Report on the Census of 1846, January 15, 1847, C.O. 172/12.
10. Anderson to Russell, May 1, 1840, C.O. 167/216.
11. Enclosure in D. Barclay to Russell, September 20, 1839, C.O. 167/215.
12. A Colonial Office Memorandum on the extracts of letters from Mauritius, dated April 24, May 1 and August 1839, enclosed in Barclay to Russell, September 20, 1839. in *ibid.*
13. Nicolay's minute, July 20, 1839, C.O. 170/12.
14. Nicolay to Glenelg, March 15, 1839, C.O. 167/209.
15. Immigration Committee to Nicolay, January 21, 1840, enclosed in Nicolay to Russell, February 18, 1840, C.O. 167/217.
16. Nicolay to Russell, February 18, 1840, in *ibid.*
17. Russell to Smith, August 19, 1840, in *ibid.*
18. Enclosure in Colonel J. Power, Officer Administering the Government of Mauritius, to Russell, June 22, 1840, C.O. 167/222.
19. Report of the Committee on the Causes of the Insufficiency of the Labouring Population, C.O. 170/21.
20. Report of the Finance Committee, August 13, 1853, C.O. 170/37.
21. Report of the Committee on the Insufficiency of Labour, C.O. 170/21.
22. *The Mauritius Times* (July 15, 1848), C.O. 172/12.
23. Quoted in *ibid.*
24. Report of the Finance Committee, August 13, 1853, C.O. 170/37.
25. Basil Lubbock, *Coolie Ships and Oil Sailors* (Glasgow, 1935), pp. 26-27.
26. Hollingworth, *They Came to Mauritius*, pp. 131-32.
27. De Burgh-Edwards, *The History of Mauritius*, p. 82.
28. Barnwell and Toussaint, *Short History of Mauritius*, pp. 176, 185; Arthur Jessop, *A History of the Mauritius Government Railways, 1864 to 1964* (Port Louis, 1964), p. 4.
29. Great Britain, *Immigrants and Liberated Africans*, P.P. L (1873), p. 5.



30. C. R. Telfair to the Acting Secretary of the Council of Government, February 22, 1864, on Indian "vagrancy," Proceedings of the Council of Government, March 3, 1864, C.O. 170/66.
31. Census Returns, April 1861, C.O. 170/58.
32. Ibid.
33. Barnwell and Toussaint, *Short History of Mauritius*, pp. 160-61.
34. Ibid., pp. 161-62, 181; Burton Benedict, *Mauritius: Problems of a Plural Society* (New York, 1965), pp. 18-19.
35. Great Britain, *Report of the Royal Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Treatment of Immigrants in Mauritius*, P.P. XXXIV, C. 1115 (1875).
36. Mauritius, Administration Reports for 1879, C.O. 170/104.
37. Benedict, *Mauritius*, pp. 18-19.
38. First Report on the Census of 1846, January 15, 1847, C.O. 172/12.
39. The exact number of the "apprentices" at the time of emancipation is not known; however, according to the census of 1851, there were 4,671 ex-"apprentices" out of a total population of 6,811. See Mauritius, *Blue Book for 1859* (1860).
40. William Cope Devereux, *A Cruise in the "Gorgon"* (London, 1869), pp. 142-44.
41. J. Horne, Report on the Seychelles, May 20, 1875, C.M.S. Records, reel no. 106.
42. Enclosure in Nicolay to Normanby, September 27, 1839, C.O. 167/212.
43. Nicolay to Normanby, September 27, 1839, in *ibid*; Governor Stevenson's minute, June 3, 1862, Proceedings of the Council of Government, June 10, 1862, C.O. 170/58.
44. Pridham, *England's Colonial Empire*, pp. 290-91.
45. Proceedings of the Council of Government for the Half Year of 1862, C.O. 170/59; Great Britain, *Reports for the Year 1850 to the Secretary of State having the Department of the Colonies*, P.P. XXXIV, 142 (1851), p. 282.
46. E. Dupuy, District Magistrate and Acting Civil Commissioner of the Seychelles, to the Colonial Secretary of Mauritius, November 28, 1862, Proceedings of the Council of Government, February 27, 1863, C.O. 170/62.
47. Stevenson's minute, October 31, 1862, Proceedings of the Council of Government, October 31, 1862, C.O. 170/59.
48. Great Britain, *The Reports Made for the Year 1863 to the Secretary of State having the Department of the Colonies. Part I. West Indies and Mauritius*, P.P. XXXVII, 3423 (1865), p. 124.
49. J. E. G. Lionnet, "Agriculture in Seychelles: A Retrospect," *Journal of the Seychelles Society*, no. 2 (October 1962), pp. 17 and 23.
50. P.P. XXXVII, 3423 (1865), p. 124; Great Britain, *Reports Showing the Present State of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions. Part 1. West Indies and Mauritius*, P.P. XLVIII, 3812 (1867) p. 154.
51. Ibid.
52. Great Britain, *Papers relating to Her Majesty's Possessions. Reports for 1876*, P.P. LIX, C. 1869 (1877), p. 170.
53. Proceedings of the Council of Government, June 10, 1862, C.O. 170/58.
54. Devereux, *A Cruise in the "Gorgon,"* pp. 143-44; also see Mauritius, *Blue Book for the Year 1865* (1866).

55. S. Hobbs to Reverend E. Hutchinson, May 19, 1869, C.M.S. Records, reel no. 105.
56. Great Britain, *Papers relating to Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions. Reports for 1877, 1878 and 1879*, P.P. XLVIII, C. 2598 (1880), p. 283.
57. *Blue Book for 1860* (1861); H. N. D. Beyts, Acting Protector of Immigrants, to Governor Stevenson, January 15, 1861, C.O. 170/54.
58. P.P. XXXVII, 3423 (1865), p. 126.
59. Thomas H. Sparshott, to the C.M.S. Secretaries in London, February 14, 1870, C.M.S. Records, reel no. 105; Bishop Tozer to the C.M.S. Secretaries, October 16, 1872, in *ibid.*
60. Sparshott to the C.M.S. Secretaries, November 23, 1870, in *ibid.*
61. The Anglican Bishop of Mauritius to Hutchinson, March 8, 1871, in *ibid.*
62. Bishop Royston to the C.M.S. Secretaries, October 12, 1874, in *ibid.*
63. Nwulia, *Britain and Slavery in East Africa*, pp. 151-52.
64. W. B. Chancellor to Reverend H. Wright, September 20, 1875, C.M.S. Records, reel no. 105.
65. P.P. XXXVII, 3423 (1865), p. 126.
66. Great Britain, *Papers relating to Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions. Part III of 1875*, P.P. LI, C. 1336 (1875), p. 275.
67. Great Britain, *Papers relating to Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions. Reports for 1875-76 and '77*, P.P. LIX, C. 1825 (1877), p. 157.
68. Proceedings of the Council of Government, September 6, 1872, C.O. 170/83.
69. P.P. LIX, C. 1825 (1877), p. 157; Chancellor to the C.M.S. Secretaries, December 8, 1875, C.M.S. Records, reel no. 105.
70. Vincent W. Ryan, *Mauritius and Madagascar; Journal of an Eight Years' Residence in the Diocese of Mauritius, and of a Visit to Madagascar* (London, 1864), p. 23.
71. Patrick Beaton, *Creoles and Coolies*, p. 6.
72. Mauritius, Report of the Committee of the General Board of Health on Black Town, March 30, 1869, in Proceedings of the General Board of Health during the Year 1873, C.O. 170/86.
73. *Ibid.*
74. Minutes of the Board of Health, July 10, 1873, in *ibid.*
75. Ryan, *Mauritius and Madagascar*, pp. 51-52.
76. Chancellor to the C.M.S. Secretaries, April 7, 1875, C.M.S. Records, reel no. 105.
77. Beaton, *Creoles and Coolies*, p. 83; Great Britain, *Immigration of Labourers into the West India Colonies and Mauritius*, P.P. XXXIX, 325 (1847), pp. 256, 265-66 and 270.
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79. P. B. Ayres, Report on the Vital Statistics of the District of Port Louis for the Year 1860, dated September 11, 1861, C.O. 170/55.
80. Report of the Committee on Hospital Accommodation, June 4, 1846, C.O. 170/24.
81. Report of the Committee on Medical Aid and Attendance Provided for Labourers in the Country Districts, undated, C.O. 170/22; Annual Report of the Civil Hospital for the Year 1859, Proceedings of the Council of Government for the Second Half of 1860, C.O. 170/50.

82. Beaton, *Creoles and Coolies*, p. 88.
83. P.P. XLVIII, C 2598 (1880), p. 280.
84. Anderson to Russell, May 1, 1840, C.O. 167/216.
85. P.P. XXXIX, 325 (1847), pp. 259-60.
86. *Ibid.*, pp. 267-68.
87. P.P. XXXIX, 325 (1847), p. 261.
88. Great Britain, *British Colonies (West Indies and Mauritius)*, P.P. XXVIII, 691-1 (1846), p. 350.
89. P.P. XLVIII, C. 2598 (1880), pp. 279-80.
90. Barnwell and Toussaint, *Short History*, p. 166; E. Poujade and I. Bonnefoi to Governor Higginson, March 22, 1851, C.O. 170/32.
91. Bishop Ryan to Reverend Henry Venn, August 4, 1857, C.M.S. Records, reel no. 105.
92. P.P. XXXVII, 3423 (1865), pp. 127-28.
93. Mylius to Dick, April 10, 1839, enclosed in Nicolay to Normanby, September 27, 1839, C.O. 167/212.
94. P.P. XLVIII, 3812 (1867), p. 118.
95. Proceedings of the Council of Government, January 12, 1866, C.O. 170/71; P.P. XLVIII, C. 2598 (1880), pp. 267-68.
96. P.P. XV, 560 (1836), pp. 481-82.
97. Report of the Finance Committee on Revenue and Expenditure for the Year 1835, dated April 4, 1835, C.O. 170/7.
98. Proceedings of the Council of Government, July 10, 1837, C.O. 170/9; Le Brun to the Colonial Secretary of Mauritius, May 25, 1837, in *ibid.*
99. P.P. XV, 560 (1836), pp. 219-22. According to Glenelg, the Parliamentary grant for the erection of a normal school in Mauritius was £1,000. See Glenelg to Nicolay, December 18, 1836, C.O. 167/190.
100. Le Brun's Report, November 15, 1838, enclosed in Nicolay to Glenelg, March 13, 1839, C.O. 167/209.
101. James Blackhouse to Buxton, May 14, 1838, C.O. 167/208; James Blackhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Mauritius and South Africa* (London, 1844), pp. 25-27.
102. Blackhouse, *Narrative*, p. 29.
103. Chevallier to Gomm, May 21, 1845, C.O. 170/22.
104. P.P. XXXIX, 325 (1847), p. 261.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
106. Nicolay's minute, June 10, 1837, C.O. 170/9.
107. Proceedings of the Council of Government, August 11, 1837, in *ibid.*
108. Proceedings of the Council of Government, July 8, 1839, C.O. 170/12.
109. Proceedings of the Council of Government, December 21, 1837-December 31, 1838, C.O. 170/11; Nicolay to Glenelg, July 27, 1839, C.O. 167/212.
110. Proceedings of the Council of Government, August 1, 1842, C.O. 170/12; Proceedings of the Council of Government, June 19, 1843, C.O. 170/18; Report on Government Schools for the Year 1872, Proceedings of the Council of Government, March 4, 1873, C.O. 170/85.



111. First Report of the Education Committee for the Year 1843, C.O. 170/18.
112. Ryan, *Mauritius and Madagascar*, pp. 27-28, 72, 177-79 and 212-13.
113. Report on Government Assisted Schools during 1858, C.O. 170/46.
114. Higginson's minute, June 27, 1857, C.O. 170/41.
115. P.P. LIX, C. 1869 (1877), pp. 156-57.
116. Report for the Year 1857 on Government Assisted Schools, C.O. 170/44; Great Britain, *Education (Mauritius)*, P.P. XLI, 371 (1857-58), pp. 3-35 passim.
117. Proceedings of the Council of Government, August 3, 1863, C.O. 170/63.
118. J. Comber, Inspector of Schools, to Governor A. H. Gordon, June 21, 1872, Proceedings of the Council of Government, July 16, 1872, C.O. 170/83.
119. Finance Committee, Report, September 9, 1872, Proceedings of the Council of Government, September 17, 1872, in *ibid.*
120. Report of the Committee on the Emancipated Population, C.O. 170/24.
121. P.P. XLVIII, 3812 (1867), p. 117.
122. John T. Bradley, *History of the Seychelles*, pp. 252 and 258-59; G. I. Michael "Education in the Seychelles: The Early Days," *Journal of the Seychelles Society*, no. 1 (October 1961), p. 38; Sister Mary Casey, "A Centenary (1861-1961)," *Journal of the Seychelles Society*, no. 1 (October 1961) pp. 55-56.
123. Ryan, *Mauritius and Madagascar*, pp. 105 and 151-52.
124. P.P. XXXVII, 3423 (1865), p. 128.
125. Comber to Gordon, June 21, 1872, C.O. 170/83; P.P. LI, C. 1336 (1875), pp. 278-79.
126. Major H. Grallan, Aide de Camp and Private Secretary to Governor A. Phayre, to the Civil Commissioner of the Seychelles, October 9, 1875, enclosed in Grallan to Reverend Chancellor, same date, C.M.S. Records, reel no. 105.
127. Bradley, *History of the Seychelles*, p. 253.
128. De Burgh-Edwards, *History of Mauritius*, pp. 77-78.
129. Quoted in *The Mauritius Times* (September 29, 1848), C.O. 172/12.
130. *The Mauritius Times* (October 6, 1848), in *ibid.*
131. Gomm's Memorandum, October 8, 1848, enclosed in Dick to J. E. Arbuthnot, Chairman of the Merchants and Planters' Association, *The Mauritius Times* (October 16, 1848), in *ibid.*
132. *The Mauritius Times* (August 23, 1848), C.O. 172/12.
133. Grey to Gomm, May 17, 1849, C.O. 170/29.
134. Surveyor-General to the Colonial Secretary of Mauritius, July 3, 1849, in *ibid.*
135. Beaton, *Creoles and Coolies*, p. 100.
136. Proceedings of the Council of Government, August 24, 1849, C.O. 170/29.
137. Proceedings of the Council of Government, October 16, 1850, C.O. 170/31.
138. Great Britain, *Copy of a Despatch from the Governor of Mauritius to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, With a Report on the State of the Rural Districts*, P.P. XXXI, 110 (1852), p. 4.

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### **Conclusion: Slavery, Status, and Class**

A slave is a person owned by another human being. In the past slaves were recruited from war prisoners and from the proceeds of raids and kidnappings. On occasion, families or communities were driven by hunger to sell or pawn some of their members for food. A pawn was not a slave as such, but he became one if his relatives failed to redeem him. Another important source of slaves was the condemnation of individuals or groups as slaves as a punishment for real or imaginary crimes. The uses to which slaves were put were many and varied in time and space, and according to the laws and customs of the societies involved. In the European world, including areas such as the Americas, where immigrant Europeans settled in large numbers, slavery was essentially an institution designed to furnish cheap, or theoretically cheap, instruments of production. In Africa the practice of slavery varied so much that some writers view the institution of slavery as a continuum. At one end of the scale slaves were valued as a means of enlarging kinship units and enhancing the social and political standing of kinsmen or individuals.<sup>1</sup> At the other end, slaves were simply chattels. In Asia the practice of slavery combined features found in the slave systems indicated above. Although the practice of slavery varied enormously in all these places, slave institutions shared in common one essential quality: the slave was a person *owned* by a captor and used by the latter to serve his purposes, and it is immaterial whether or not the purposes resulted in the partial or full incorporation of the slave in his captor's household, community, or society, or in the sale of the slave as chattel. However transient or "mild" his slave status was, the captive was still a slave.

In its origin and growth, slavery in Mauritius and the Seychelles was like slavery in the New World: both systems were created to meet economic demands in a new environment. When the European settlers first began to exploit the resources of the Americas, they relied on their own energies and the assistance of indentured white workers. Where it was possible, they pressed into service the indigenous inhabitants, the American Indians, but the rigors of service combined with exotic diseases and the exigencies of Euro-Amerindian relations to thin Indian ranks. The resulting labor problem was increased by the preference of the indentured white workers whose contracts of service had expired to work for themselves rather than for others. The settlers and their "mother countries" turned to Africa to help them resolve the difficulties. What happened is a familiar story. At first the slaves imported from Africa were small in number, but as plantation economies developed and expanded in the more favored parts of the New World, the number of slaves forced to emigrate from Africa increased.

A development similar to the above occurred at first in Mauritius and then in the Seychelles. The first white settlers in Mauritius, the Dutch, were too few in number and unequal to the task of developing the resources of the island. Unlike their European counterparts in the Americas, they did not encounter a native population to exploit. The Dutch East India Company came to their aid by importing slaves from Madagascar (Malagasy) and the African mainland. After decades of unrewarding colonization, the company evacuated the island in favor of the more promising lands in South Africa and the fabulous East Indies. The Dutch settlers were succeeded by the French, and the French East India Company followed the Dutch example of importing slaves from Madagascar, the neighboring islands and the African mainland. The increased cultivation of Mauritius, stimulated in part by increased importations of slaves and in part by the influx of French settlers from Europe and India, particularly after the French had lost their Indian settlements to England, created more demand for labor. The



demand was met by the expansion of the slave trade; the human traffic grew so much so that by 1810 the slaves outnumbered the white inhabitants two to one. In the meanwhile the French colonizing enterprise had been extended to the Seychelles, some one thousand miles from the Mascarenes (Mauritius and Réunion, then known respectively as Ile de France and Bourbon). The French settlement and exploitation of the Seychelles were made possible by an early extension of slavery to those islands.

The change in colonial regimes in 1810, following Britain's capture of Mauritius and the Seychelles, did not diminish the importance of slavery to the economies of the islands. In spite of Britain's ban on the importation of slaves into the islands in 1813, the demand for slaves kept pace with the demand for agricultural labor; the demand itself was fed by the considerable expansion of the sugar industry in Mauritius and of coffee and food production in the Seychelles. The British governments of the day repeatedly urged their colonial governors to stop the importations of slaves at the same time that they maintained the institution of slavery itself in the "twin" colony and did not provide the French-speaking proprietors with alternative sources of labor. The slave owners, both big and small, did not fail to notice the inconsistency in a "liberal" logic that proscribed the "external" slave trade but sanctioned "internal" slave trading and slavery. Luckily for the planters, politically and culturally uncomfortable in the alien British rule, the anti-slave trade patrols of the British warships were so feeble that they did not experience too much difficulty in importing the slaves they needed; moreover, a very faulty slave registry system enabled them to pass off many of those slaves as "home-grown"!

The constitution and the structure of plantation society in Mauritius and the Seychelles were greatly influenced by New World precedents. The basic slave law in the islands, the royal edict of 1723, was patterned after slave codes in the French colonies in the West Indies. The royal edict envisaged and laid down rules to govern a society of masters and slaves, and a society stratified

along racial lines. The masters were whites and the slaves were nonwhites, since the law did not recognize the enslavement of whites. The white masters were endowed with proprietary rights: they could own lands, buildings and slaves. They were required to provide "sufficient" food, clothing and shelter for their slaves, and to show kindness to them. The white proprietors could not marry their slaves, nor were they permitted officially to cohabit with them. The issues of illicit sexual unions between whites and their slaves were to be condemned to the perpetual ownership and wardship of the state. In addition to the loss of the undesirable offspring, the offending masters were liable to fines or other forms of penalties. In return for food, clothing and shelter as determined adequate by their masters, the slaves were required to work for the sole benefit of their owners. The slaves were chattels stripped of every basic human right except the right to breathe and to ingest food in amounts sufficient to make them efficient instruments of production.

The caste structure of colonial Mauritius and the Seychelles was somewhat modified by provisions for the emergence of "Free Blacks." The law provided that slave owners who were twenty-five years of age or older could emancipate their slaves after receiving official permission, for manumissions granted to slaves without official sanction were deemed to be illegal and were to be punished by the confiscation of the illegally manumitted persons and their condemnation to slavery. The slaves emancipated with official approval were allowed the privilege of breeding free children with their slave concubines under certain conditions: if a "Free Black" married his slave concubine who had borne him children, the children became free and legitimate. These provisions resulted in the creation of a sizable number of "Free Blacks."

The population of "Free Blacks" was also increased by the failure of the colonial officials to prevent miscegenation. In a situation where white women were either not available or were too few in number, the white male colonists could not resist the



temptation of befriending the slave women in a special, intimate manner. The products of such unions were frequently emancipated. What happened was that the "Free Persons of Colour" became almost indetical with the "Free Black" population.

The "Free Persons of Colour" or "Free Blacks" were free persons, allowed to farm, trade and acquire property through their own sweat, but they could not inherit property from the masters who had freed them. Since land and the products of the land were the major sources of wealth, the prohibition that prevented white masters from transferring property to their illegitimate "coloured" offspring had significant implications for the distribution of wealth. What the framers of the fundamental slave law anticipated and what private practice largely confirmed was the concentration of wealth and power in white hands. The "Free Blacks" were personally free but were socially unequal to the whites. Even that freedom was greatly emasculated by the imposition of legal disabilities on the supposedly free blacks. At the end of the French period in Mauritian and Seychellois history, the colonial society was one in which class, status and roles were based fundamentally on color differentiation.

The imposition of British rule on the islands resulted in the imposition of an alien imperial elite on the old French-speaking elite. To mollify the resentful French settlers and to render them more amenable to British rule, the British governments upheld the class structure and roles analyzed above with certain qualifications. The ranks of the slaves were, as we saw earlier, no longer to be enlarged by fresh importations of slaves, and the social restrictions imposed on the "Free Blacks" were eased. The French settlers found it difficult to absorb the innovations. On the social plane, they used every device possible to cool the ardor and quest of the "Free Persons of Colour" for civic and social equality with whites. In the economic sphere, they refused to understand the laws undergirding an imperial system that proscribed importation of slaves but upheld "internal" slave trading and slavery. Luckily for them, the loopholes in the administration of the anti-slave trade



law and the ineffective anti-slave trade patrols enabled them to import fresh slaves to replace the dead or wasted slaves and to meet the labor demands of the agriculturally based economy. The increased vigilance of the anti-slave trade patrols in the 1820s and of colonial officials was counterbalanced by the concerted efforts and the adroitness of the slave lords and landlords. Unfortunately for the planters, some of whom were now nonslave-importing but slave-using British investors and employers, the precarious balance between legality and illegality was undermined by the "abolition" of slavery in the British empire through the Abolition Act of 1833.

The Abolition Act portended a crisis for the major industry in Mauritius, namely, the sugar industry, and threatened to make more difficult efforts to put the fragile economy of the Seychelles on a firmer footing. Before the passage of the act, the leading French-speaking proprietors had tried to convince the British government that the anti-slavery agitation in Britain was directed at crippling the economy of a colony in which the speakers of French outnumbered the speakers of English; they had also pleaded for the establishment of a colonial assembly in which the French-speaking subjects of the British crown would play a significant role. An increased political role for the Frenchmen would restore their old rights of "self-government," strengthen the loyalty of the colony to Britain, and enhance the maintenance of "law and order" in the colony. If the Abolition Act were passed against the expectations of the persons who "really mattered," the petitioners hoped that it would provide for emancipation with full compensation to the slave owners for their loss of "property rights" in men and women.

The petitioners failed to win approval of their anti-abolitionist arguments, but they won the right to be represented in the legislative assembly (also known as the Council of Government) that was established at the beginning of 1832. Their participation in government enabled them to work "harmoniously" with the accommodating colonial governors to uphold the master-servant rela-

tionships "hallowed" by custom. More important, the Abolition Act provided for monetary compensation to be given to slave owners in those parts of the British empire affected by the Act and for a short-term "apprenticeship" of the slaves to their "former" owners.

The effects of the Abolition Act and of the "apprenticeship" system were to strengthen the economic standing of the proprietary class and to renovate the system of slavery. Besides sharing some two million pounds sterling that they received for their "lost property," the slave owners were to be served by the domestic slaves for four years and by the "field hands" for six years. The slaves became free in their "persons," but they were subjected to a regime not less exploitative and coercive than slavery. Against their expectations, an imperial legislation, ostensibly designed to free the slaves and to enable them to "learn" trades and acquire skills through the performance of "customary" duties to their "former" owners, converted them into serfs. The proprietors were assured of the labor of the "emancipated" laborers, but the laborers viewed their condition as continued enslavement. The proprietors had no illusions about the subtle disguise that slavery had assumed. With their pockets enriched by the monetary compensation that they received and with the familiar labor force augmented by immigrant workers from India, the planters proceeded to expand their businesses and to reap larger profits from the sales of sugar to Britain.

The optimism of the planters for rosy days ahead was rudely shaken by the premature termination of the "apprenticeship" system in the early months of 1839 and by the suspension of Indian labor emigration later in the year. The former event, which resulted in the attainment of real freedom by the serfs and in their massive withdrawal from the sugar plantations, was denounced in the planters' periodicals as "spoliation" of "property." The latter event was greatly regretted and efforts were concerted to get the government of India to reopen Indian emigration. The efforts were eventually successful. The ban on Indian emigration from India

was lifted in 1842. Beginning from 1843, streams of Indian immigrants into Mauritius enabled the sugar industry to expand and to withstand market fluctuations. Planters were enriched and the colonial treasury was swelled.

In exploiting Indian labor, the planters drew upon the traditions of black enslavement: the Indians were looked upon more as "hands" than as persons with needs and rights of their own. The aim and the practical administration of the so-called indenture system were not to balance the interests of the planters with those of the immigrant workers, but to maintain a constant flow of cheap, abundant, and subservient laborers.

In the Seychelles the agricultural crisis was not relieved by Indian immigration. A number of factors had combined to create a decadent economy. Before the abolition of slavery, unfavorable fluctuations in the prices of coffee and cotton, due partly to the inefficient methods of cultivating the staples in the Seychelles and partly to the expansion of the sugar industry in Mauritius, had resulted in a considerable export of manpower and capital from the Seychelles to Mauritius. What the emancipation of the slaves did was to accelerate rather than to initiate agricultural decline in the Seychelles. Since capital and labor had better prospects of utilization in Mauritius, and the economy of the Seychelles was considered to be an adjunct of that of Mauritius, the colonial governors did very little to help the Seychellois. In the 1860s, however, several expedients were tried. Many of the slaves that the British warships recaptured from the slave ships caught in the Indian Ocean were "settled" in the Seychelles on terms favorable to the hard-pressed planters but disadvantageous to the welfare of the recaptives. Measures against "squatting" on planters' lands and efforts to relieve overcrowding in the huts of the emancipated slaves for the "sake of good health" forced the former slaves into the labor market. Sharecropping by former slaves provided another relief. The economy was also strengthened by the gradual shift from the cultivation of crops that required large amounts of labor to the cultivation of those requiring lesser amounts.



In both Mauritius and the Seychelles, particularly in the former, the quarter century after emancipation saw significant improvements in the conditions of the inhabitants as a whole, and changes in class structure. Increased missionary activities in education and greater government interest in the extension of social and health services provided new opportunities. The "Free Coloureds," whose ranks were augmented by emancipation, made good use of the new opportunities in education, trade and employment. As indentured Indian workers supplanted the erstwhile slaves as the most numerous sector of the "laboring" population, and as the "Free Blacks" joined the lower ranks of the privileged classes, a change in class structure and social standing occurred. At the very top of the social hierarchy were the British governors, planters, merchants, soldiers and missionaries. Below the imperial elite was a larger layer of the French-speaking plantocrats and businessmen. The next stratum consisted of the "emergent" "Free Blacks" and Indian merchants and artisans well-to-do enough to "pass" as members of the "sociable, cultured" classes. Below these classes were the emancipated slaves with little or insignificant "white blood" in their veins, with little education, and with very small earning power. These men and women had long memories. Decades of an exploitative and dehumanizing slave system, and a short-term but hardly less coercive "apprenticeship" system imposed by an abolition law that endowed them with no economic benefits, had convinced them that the best and safest guarantees of their welfare lay in self-employment and in the maintenance of minimal contacts with the world of the bosses. That their "lighter-skinned" brethren had joined the ranks of the privileged was probably no consolation to them. Their relative aloofness was reciprocated by those who no longer needed their services.

At the bottom of society was a large mass of brown workers, the objects of ingenious forms of exploitation. Until the 1870s, when the report of a royal commission awakened the imperial government to a greater realization of its obligations toward these men, their overall condition did not leave much to be desired. The

immigrant workers were not slaves as the blacks once were, but their working conditions and the administration of the system of indentureship made them unfree rather than free workers.

By the 1870s Mauritius and the Seychelles had changed in important respects. The changes, however, had not advanced far enough to erase the heritage of slavery, a heritage that stressed the “superiority” of “white” skin to “dark” skin, and that greatly influenced the distribution of wealth, power and privilege on color lines.

### **Note**

1. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis. 1977); Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven and London, 1977).

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